Golf Digest

FEBRUARY 2023

2023 SEASON PREVIEW

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1 McILROY
6 SMITH
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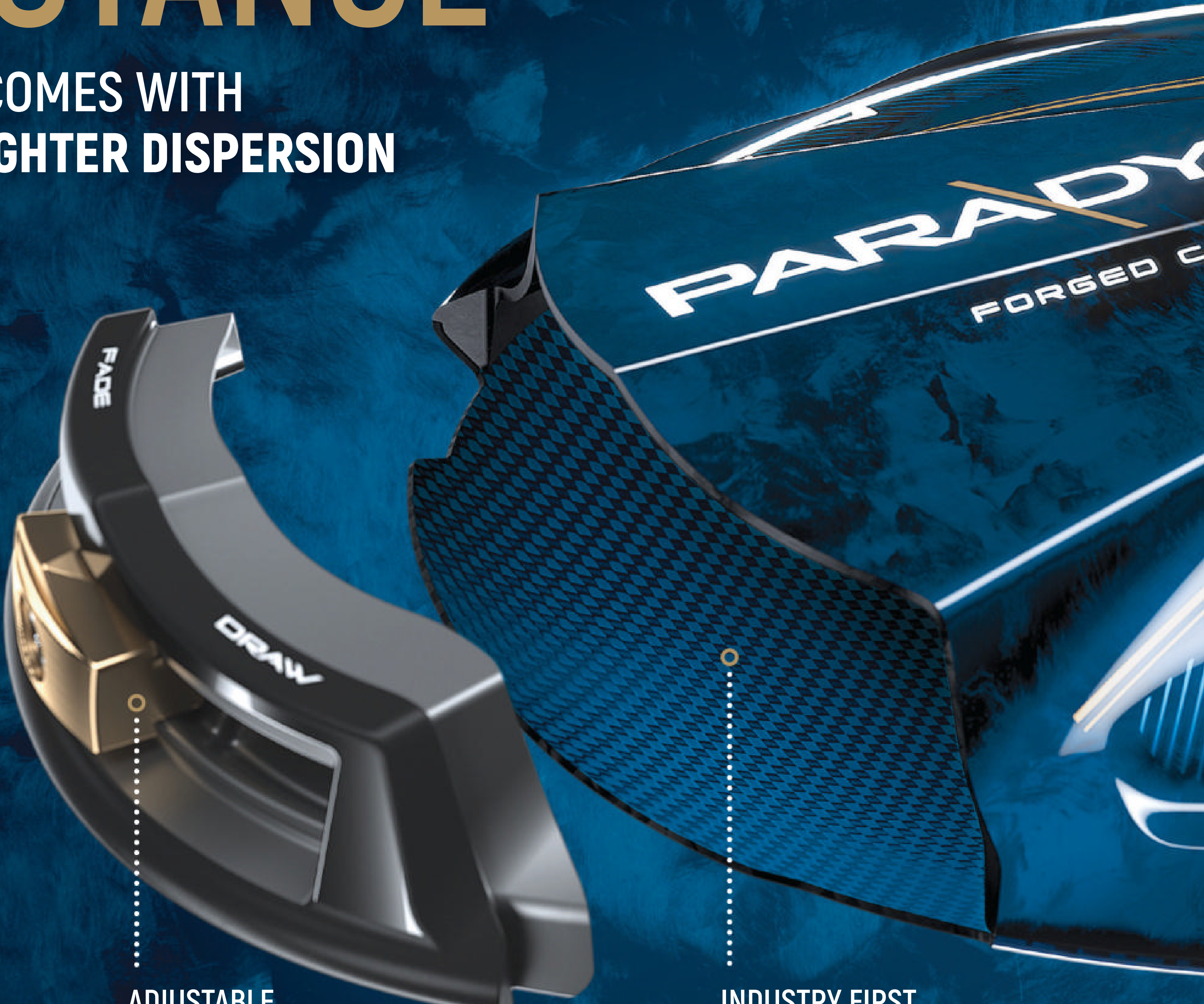

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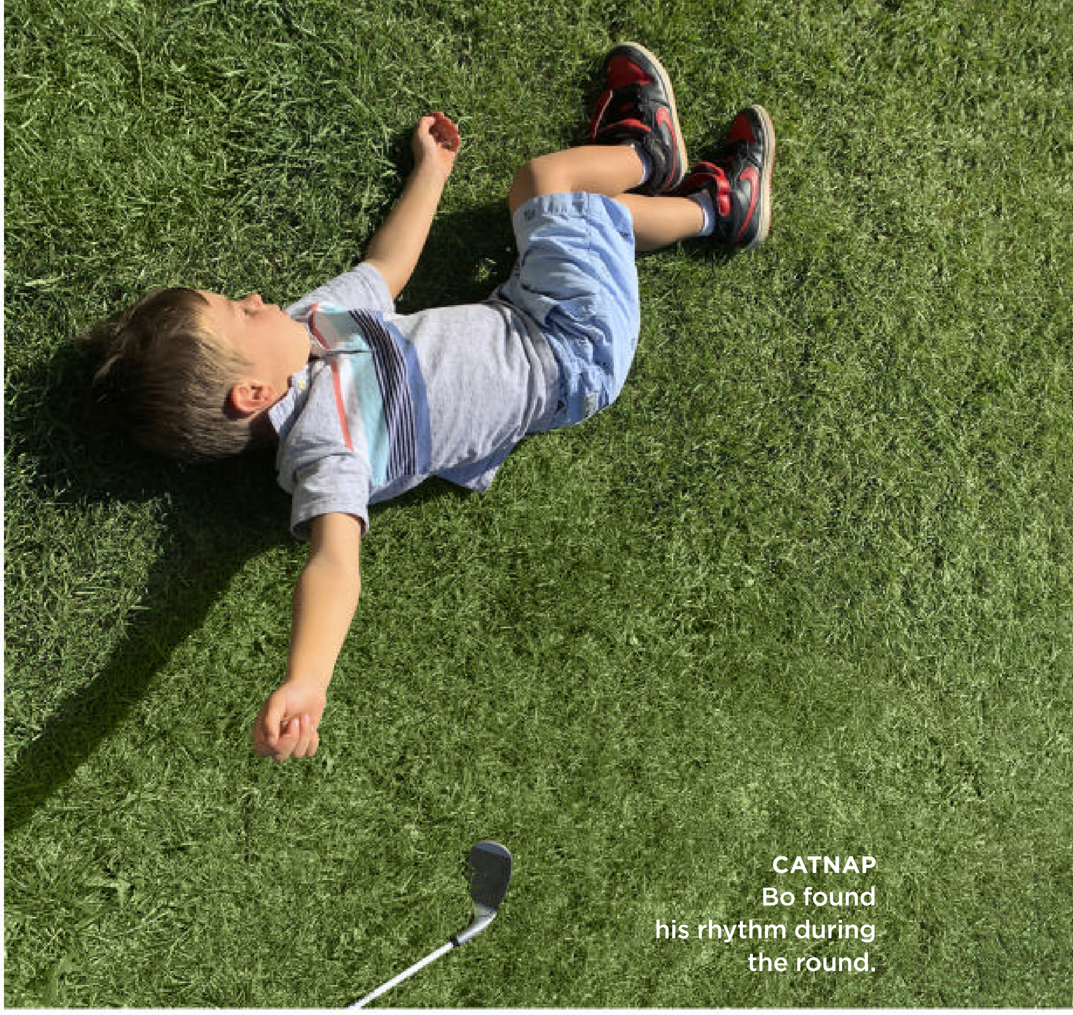

CATNAP Bo found his rhythm during the round.

Tournament Tested

Could a 4-year-old go all 18 holes?

By Max Adler

I DECIDED IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO enter my son in his first 18-hole event. He's 4. ▸ Now, Bo reliably advances the ball 30 to 60 yards on most swings. He hits his driver an identical distance to his iron only because the shaft is too stiff. The reason is that I chop-sawed a junior driver in half and slapped on a grip, which might sound like derelict parenting to technicians, but at the time he was still in diapers, and custom-fitting lefty clubs for a toddler felt unnecessary. (Would this strange predilection even last?) As for his third club, a putter, he doesn't yet understand the concept and hockey-dribbles the ball into the cup only with voluble coaching.

No disrespect to past champions, but the Malbon x Chido Invitational is as unserious a full-net modified scramble as it gets. When the title sponsors are a streetwear-clothing brand and a tequila-spiked seltzer, don't be surprised if a DJ is blasting beats, the dress code is Carnevale with a collar and the smell gets a bit funky. But you won't find a more welcoming and inclusive crowd. With 35 foursomes in a shotgun start, pace of play under 5½ hours was never even an idea, and so a lenient setting for any Bo-shenanigans.

As we pulled into Long Island's Nassau Country Club—built in 1896, birthplace of the front, back and match "nassau" wager, and so an intriguing get for ol' dad—I was shaking with nerves. How would this end? At this point, the most holes Bo had ever played was two.

I unbuckled my golf partner from his car seat, awakening him, and his mood was mute suspicion as we entered the grand clubhouse. Holding hands, we passed through the men's locker room. Not that anyone was unfriendly, but I was reminded that some places truly are just for adults. We managed the sumptuous buffet line without knocking anything over, found a table and talked strategy. This was "a big tournament," but we would do well if Bo stood where I told him and was quiet and still when others hit. His primary concern was "Will we win?" As I cut his sausage into pieces, I allowed it to be a possibility.

Our group was 1A, which Bo perceived as a grave slight when everyone else got to drive the fun carts away and we had to wait. Our pairing was with Henry Lopez and Byron Kirkland from The Original Tee Golf Club, an organization that celebrates the legacy of Black tee-inventor Dr. George Grant and promotes diversity. I thanked them in advance for their patience and apologized that we were unlikely to be competitive in the format. "C'mon, man," Henry said. "You're doing what it's all about—exposing him to the game."

The first seven holes went great. Bo was finding the clubface, relishing applause from Henry and Bryon, understanding the rhythm of hitting, picking up, and then all of us hitting from the next spot. Once, I stuck a pitch-mark repair tool in the turf as a mark, which oddly fascinated him. He then insisted on having his own "pointer." It was a struggle to watch Bo take 30 seconds to fish it from his tiny pocket and kneel in indecision about where to place it, but this didn't seem worth discipline . . . yet.

At the first sign of whinging, I administered three ounces of ginger ale; two holes later, chips. But Bo was crashing, and at No. 11 he plopped down in the fairway in sleepy protest. Then the thumping energy of the dance party at No. 12 enlivened him. At No. 14, I played my trump card: allowing him to sit on my lap and steer the cart as I worked the gas and brake. This thrill got us all the way in. At the 19th hole Bo had his first-ever sip of Coke and, like he always does in public, showed off his ability to approach attractive women.

When he was ready, he just said, "OK, let's go home."

He slept all the way. I carried him up to bed. We won.

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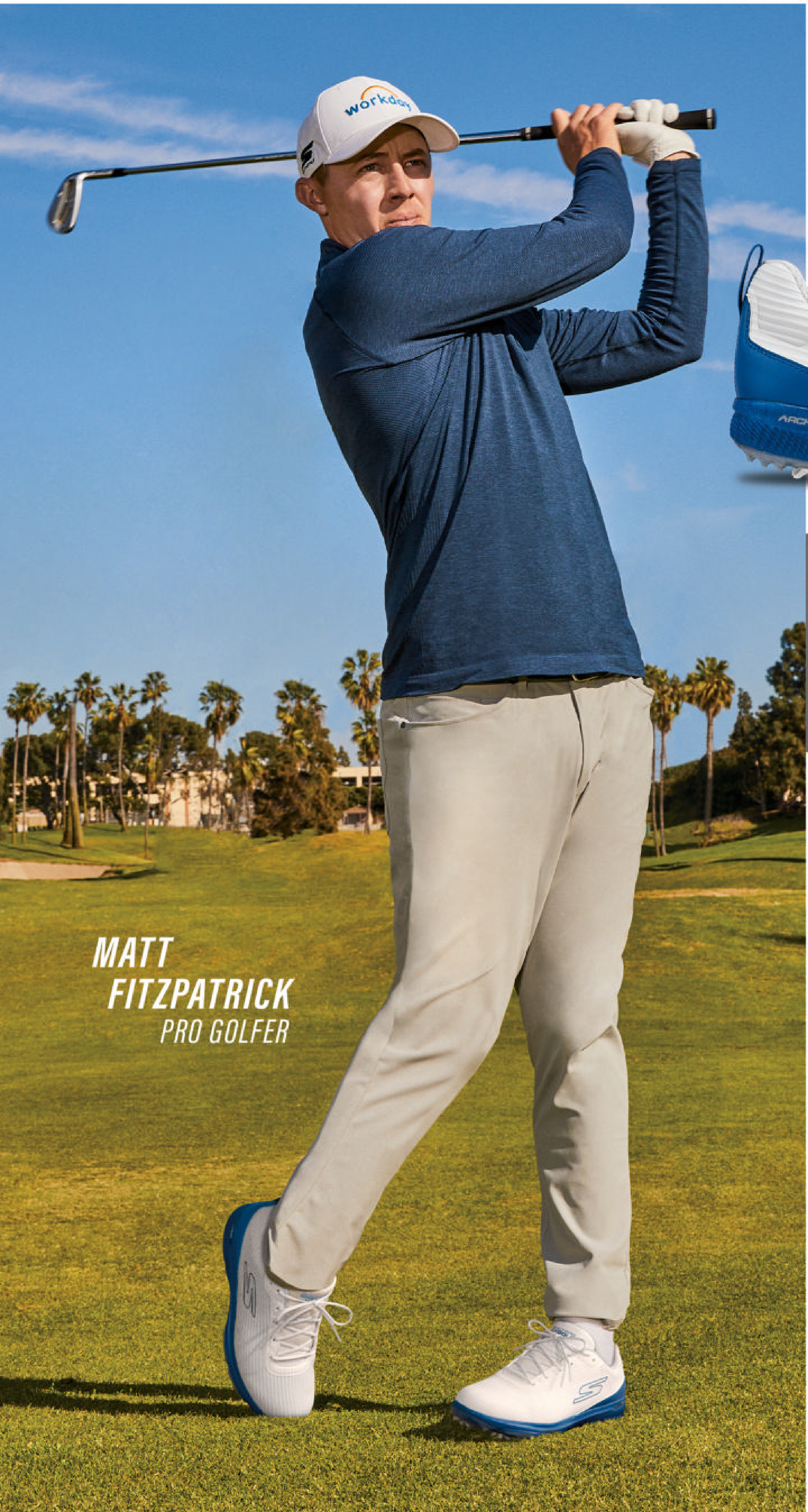

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Printed in the U.S.A. Volume 74, Issue 1, February 2023. GOLF DIGEST (ISSN 0017-176X) is published monthly except for combined March/April, July/August, October/November and December/January issues by Warner Bros. Discovery. Principal office: Golf Digest, 230 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y., 10003. **Warner Bros. Discovery** Andrew Georgiou, President and GM; Gunnar Wiedenfels, Chief Financial Officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration 123242885-RT0001. Postmaster: Send all UAA to CFS (see DMM 507.1.5.2); non-postal and military facilities: Send address corrections to Golf Digest, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA, 50037-0617. **For subscriptions, address adjustments or back-issue inquiries:** Write to Golf Digest, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037-0617; visit golfdigest.com; or call 800-PAR-GOLF. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the post office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within eight weeks after receipt of order. **Address all editorial, business and production correspondence to:** Golf Digest magazine, 230 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y., 10003. For reprints, please email golfdigest@wrightsmedia.com or call Wright's Media 877-652-5295. Golf Digest does not accept any unsolicited submissions and is not responsible for the return or loss of, or for any damage or any other injury to, unsolicited manuscripts, unsolicited artwork (including, but not limited to, drawings, photographs and transparencies) or any other unsolicited materials.

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TEE SHEET

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Undercover Caddie

A drinking problem wrecked my player relationship and nearly ended my career

Drinking cost me my job on the PGA Tour. How did it happen? It's like that Hemingway line: "Gradually, then suddenly."

I always thought I had a safe relationship with alcohol. My first beer was in college, and it's not like I was vertical on a keg every weekend. I might have a six-pack every Friday and Saturday night. I know that qualifies as binge drinking now, but back then, and compared to a lot of other college students, that was considered moderate.

After graduation, one of my high school buddies tried to chase his dream on the mini-tours. I didn't have a job yet, so I figured I'd caddie for him and delay adulting as long as I could. He didn't last a year before quitting, realizing his game was nowhere near what it needed to be. I wasn't ready for an office job, so I found another bag, which led to another bag, and two years later I was on the PGA Tour.

When I started, the leading money winner on tour made less than $2 million, and only 20 or so guys cracked $500,000. If you were a caddie and weren't with a star, you were roughing it, and for the first five years, that was me. Still, I loved it. I was single and didn't need much. As much fun as I was having, life on the road can be constricting when you're on a budget. One of the cheaper things to do is, well, drink.

Not helping matters was rooming with other caddies each week. Everyone else was drinking, too, almost on a daily basis. Again, I enjoyed myself, but it's not like we were getting bombed all the time; on most nights I would have just two drinks to unwind.

Still, there were other times when we drank a lot more. I don't care how practiced you are at putting 'em back, heavy drinking catches up to you the next day. That our jobs require being outside, often in the heat, didn't make those days easy. Still, when you're in your late 20s, even early 30s, you can handle those days—or at least hide them.

Then I got pretty bad at hiding them. I know because my player's agent

ILLUSTRATION BY MADISON KETCHAM

told me he was worried because I was constantly showing up to the course hungover. By that point I was near 40. Two of the guys I had routinely roomed with were no longer on tour, and two others had started shacking up with another group. I still couldn't afford solo accommodations, but I never made an effort to get to know the new caddies I was with on a weekly basis. Often I would drink by myself, sometimes 10 beers a night, before falling asleep. The agent was right; I was a mess. I wish I could tell you I came to my senses, but I didn't. Two weeks later I got wrecked before a Saturday round, and on the range my player gave me a *What did you do last night?* stare.

How was it messing with my work? I wasn't giving my player bad reads or yardages. It's not like I would pass out in a bunker or vomit on the course (although sometimes both seemed like good options). Frankly, my player didn't need much from me. The biggest thing he wanted was a loose mood. Usually that meant talking baseball or making him laugh. I'm not going to lie, we had one of the best rapports on tour. But looking back, when I was hungover, I tended to be silent, or my energy level wasn't where it needed to be. There weren't any dramatic on-course incidents, but my drinking affected my player's performance.

There was a dispiriting off-the-course moment, however. Not very long after the agent's warning I received a blow from my player. His parents were in town, and before a round his father told me afterward to join the group for dinner. A few hours later, as we're shutting it down for the day, my player tells me, "I don't think you should come tonight because I need your best tomorrow." He said it gently but sternly. The implication was clear: If I came out, I would drink, and I would drink to excess.

Here's the worst part: In two of the next 10 rounds we had, I showed up hungover. He knew it, too. I was sick another round, but given my track record, he probably thought I was in the bag on that day, too. Those were the last rounds we had together because after the season he fired me and told me if I wanted to stay on tour, I needed to get serious about my job.

Those first months I waited by the phone. I had been on tour for more than a decade; someone would need me. As I waited, I drank, but the phone never rang. By the time the U.S. Open came, I still didn't have a job. At that point I knew word was out about why I got canned, and the phone wouldn't be ringing anytime soon. I stopped binge drinking around then: no programs, no divine intervention, didn't go cold turkey. Instead, I weened myself off for a good two months, and that was weird—drinking not for fun but to get my body ready to be off it—but I needed to do it. I wanted to be back on tour, and the first step back would be putting the bottle down for good.

I had to return to the then-Nationwide Tour to find a bag, and although I never stuck with anyone longer than a few tournaments, I found a semi-regular job back in the big leagues. My old player had given me a recommendation. We have never totally reconciled—player-caddie breakups tend to be that way—but I am forever grateful that he did me that favor.

It has been 10 years since I've been back, and I'm actually winding down. It hasn't been easy. The temptation is still there to drink. There's still a lot of downtime, and though the money is so much better now than it was when I started, my budget is still tight. Drinking is a cheap, easy-to-get thrill, and when I hang out with other caddies, at least a few of them are enjoying their spirits. I am mostly stepping aside from a full-time bag because I'm newly married and want to be home more with my family. If I'm being completely honest, drinking played a big role in the decision, too, because quitting wasn't easy, and this caddie life only makes it harder.

Undercover Caddie suggests visiting alcohol.org if you're struggling with alcoholism.

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‘The LIV Offer Sounded Phenomenal’

I was about to finish college, I had no sponsors, and I wasn’t among the highest-ranked college players

By James Piot, with Keely Levins

DRIVING BACK TO MICHIGAN STATE AFTER missing cuts at the Masters and RBC, I was bummed. Then my phone rang. My agent was calling with an offer from LIV Golf.

My dad is a good player. He took me to a range when I was little. I knew immediately this is what I wanted to do.

* * *

My older brother, Glenn, and I spent all of our time at Fox Hills golf course in Plymouth, Mich. A bunch of us would bet every day for golf balls, $5, a hot dog. I was the youngest, so I played with a chip on my shoulder. They stopped including putts inside 10 feet in putting contests because I made them all. I love chasing perfection in golf even though it’s impossible.

* * *

I played college golf at Michigan State. We would play intramural basketball in the offseason. Coach worried about injuries, but we loved it. Working together as a team is what makes college golf so fun. Competition sharpened my game. I thought, *How can I win?* instead of *What’s my scoring average this week?* Short game was the answer. I tightened up the skills I’d developed from those contests as a kid to become consistent in a way other guys weren’t.

* * *

At the 2021 U.S. Amateur at Oakmont, my goal was to qualify for match play. Never did I think I’d be holding that trophy. When the winning putt fell, my college and high school golf buddies, coach Casey Lubahn from Michigan State, my family, everyone was there. It felt like it was too perfect to have actually happened.

* * *

My agent set up a call. Ten people from LIV were on it. They couldn’t tell me who they had signed or were pursuing, but they said it would be a team format. I loved the PGA Tour events I played in, but every guy did his thing and then vanished. To be part of a team with a big-name pro mentoring me sounded like the right way to start my career. For a guy about to finish school with no sponsors who wasn’t among the top-ranked college golfers and had just missed two PGA Tour cuts, the LIV offer sounded phenomenal.

JAMES PIOT (“PIE-OT”)
LIV GOLF
AGE 24
LIVES CANTON, MICHIGAN

* * *

I talked it over with my family, my swing instructor for over a decade, Brian Cairns, and my college coaches. There were a lot of unknowns about LIV, and I had the U.S. Open and sponsor’s exemptions at Memorial and Colonial. I could earn more PGA Tour starts—or I could miss more cuts.

* * *

If you’re thinking about your legacy, you want to play the PGA Tour. But this is a great opportunity for a guy out of college with no financial security. As I thought about the political side, I realized it’s a golf decision. I signed a two-year contract. My agent wouldn’t be happy if I told you for how much.

I bought a GCQuad launch monitor, but otherwise I’m kind of cheap. I live at home with my parents, though I’m looking to rent a place in Jupiter. Half my clothes are Michigan State gear. I still practice at the two public courses I grew up on.

* * *

Week 1 at LIV Golf, I didn’t know who would be there, if I would be the only young guy, whose team I would be on. Sergio picked me. He texted our group chat that night: “Hey, who wants to have dinner?” Sergio Garcia’s offering to have dinner with me?

* * *

I haven’t lost any friendships over joining LIV. I’ll get chirps from random people on Twitter, but I only care about what my inner circle thinks. LIV criticism is less heated overseas. I’ve gotten to travel places I never thought I’d go, but I don’t fly private. I fly Delta. I like getting the points.

* * *

At every hotel they have a room for food, and each night there are at least 12 guys hanging out. Harold Varner III helped me feel like I belong. We bet every practice round, and he points out where I need work. I’ll be spending the offseason getting bigger and adding speed. He also taught me the attitude you have to carry out here: You have to think you can win. People say we’re in it only for the money, but that’s not true.

* * *

I’ve talked to Majed al Sorour, CEO of Saudi Golf, a few times. He wants to see younger guys win. That’s big for me, seeing how much he believes in us.

* * *

When LIV started signing more guys, people tweeted, “James Piot’s going to be bumped out.” But from what I’ve heard, LIV has stayed true to the contracts we’ve signed.

* * *

I don’t want to miss out on playing the majors. I’ve avoided debates about whether LIV players should. Playing the Masters was the coolest week of my life. I’m not exempt, so I’m putting my energy toward qualifying. My goal is to try to get into a major and see what I can do. I just want to win golf tournaments.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALFONSO DURAN

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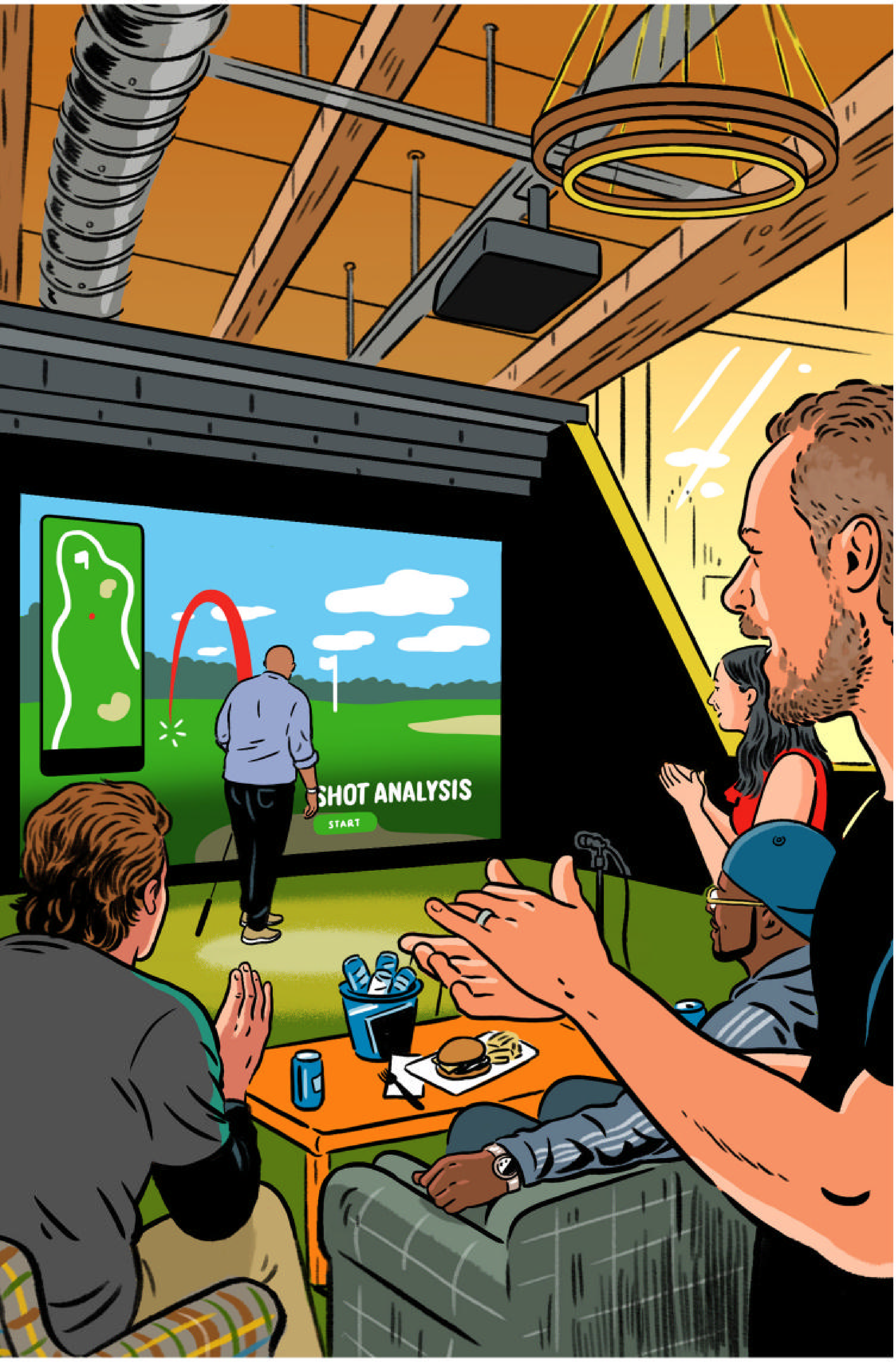

Urban Legends

Reimagining golf in an intimate, convivial setting has found an enthusiastic audience in metropolitan markets

By Matthew Rudy

Walk around Five Iron Golf's 25,000-square-foot indoor golf center-slash-cocktail lounge in midtown Manhattan, and it's almost impossible to imagine that a few years ago, it was just a single netted bay with a mini-refrigerator hidden in the back of a suit shop. Mike Doyle almost can't believe it himself.

In 2016, Doyle was doing a kind of reverse commute for a New York City golf instructor. Instead of looking to migrate to one of the potentially lucrative teaching jobs at a private club in suburban Westchester, Connecticut or Long Island, he was interested in teaching that same clientele in Manhattan in an indoor setting.

So Doyle went to work in the back of the aforementioned shop, tailoring his schedule to the peculiarities of his students' availability. "I'd get guys who were traders on Wall Street who wanted to come in and get a lesson at 6 a.m. before work," Doyle says. "It was brutal. They'd be waiting as I opened the doors and was basically still asleep."

Doyle's students hit better shots, and they also came equipped with the tools to put a business plan in motion. One of those early-morning Wall Streeters, Jared Solomon, brought in family friend Nora Dunnan—a Duke business school grad and business-development ace—and in 2017 the three came up with the concept of a sophisticated golf "hangout." Sure, you could come and hit balls on a state-of-the-art simulator but just as important were the food-and-beverage and golf-shop-fitting experiences.

"We felt like corporate entertainment was changing from going to Yankee games and eating steak dinners to smaller groups doing things more economically," Doyle says. "We found a small space where we could achieve that vibe—15- to 20-person events, some simulators, a hangout area."

For their first dedicated space, the trio tracked down a vacant yoga studio in the Flatiron District that had an unintended side benefit: a shower. "It was actually too expensive to remove it, so we kept it—and it was a huge thing," Doyle says. "People would come at

ILLUSTRATION BY KYLE HILTON

6 to use the gym and hit balls and go straight to work. We had a deal where you could pay $200 a month and come whenever you wanted off-peak, which was 6 a.m. to 4, and by the end of that first month, we knew there was going to be enough revenue to keep the lights on."

Soon, the floor above the yoga studio became available when the tenant—an internationally known DJ—got busted for running a crime ring. Five Iron filled the soundproof space with five more simulators and started looking for ways to expand. The company now has 16 locations, including Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and Seattle, with plans to add five more by the middle of 2023.

'We felt like corporate entertainment was changing to smaller groups doing things more economically.'

None of it would have been possible had the trio followed the lead of another indoor Manhattan golf space, Golf & Body, which opened in 2013. Conceived as a kind of indoor country club, Golf & Body charged a $5,000 initiation fee and more than $500 in monthly dues for access to simulators, a gym, a restaurant and the reflected glow of its association with PGA Tour players like Luke Donald and Webb Simpson. "When we opened, the Golf and Body owner invited us over," Doyle says. "The place had all the bells and whistles—just done to the nines everywhere you looked. We're sitting in his office, and he tells us in a matter-of-fact way that we have to keep our prices high and our place exclusive because golf isn't for everyone.

"I don't know if we even got to the street before the three of us looked at each other and said, 'We're not doing that,' " Doyle says. "Anything that felt exclusive or stuffy or prohibitive, we didn't want that to be a part of Five Iron, right down to the way we designed our spaces with graffiti and street art. It was a conscious thing to say, 'Hopefully, the Winged Foot guy likes this enough to come back, but this is who we are.' Turns out, they're OK with it. They can like this and like the mahogany and rich leather, too."

The beginning of the COVID pandemic in early 2019 devastated many businesses with large footprints and high built-in costs, and Golf & Body was one of them. Five Iron was on better financial footing, and its smaller spaces were able to stay open and keep customers isolated. "We had already been looking for an existing golf space to take over, where things like zoning and the complex liquor rules were already in place," Doyle says. "We made a deal where we took over that Golf & Body lease, and the office where we had that first meeting now has a simulator in it."

That space is the heart of the 25,000-square-foot flagship Midtown location, which opened in early 2021. It doesn't look anything like one of those smoky old 30-lane bowling alleys your grandfather might have frequented, but Doyle embraces one important part of that comparison.

"I used to get offended when people said 'bowling alley' as if we were something other than real golf," Doyle says, "but the more I thought about it, you know what's great about bowling? If somebody asks you if you want to go bowling, you don't ever say, 'Well, I'm not a bowler.' You go and drink beer and have a great time. That needs to be the answer about golf, too. That's what we're trying to do."

Matthew Rudy is absolutely looking for the backstory on your About page.

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What's the Secret of Longevity and Good Golf?

Don't run with chainsaws and other life-saving tips

By Jerry Tarde

HIGH-KICKIN' AT AGE 67. Sam Snead with Seve Ballesteros at the 1979 Ryder Cup.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHIL SHELDON/POPPERFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

I ONCE WROTE A BOOK WITH SAM Snead, and the most remarkable thing about it was the title: *Pigeons, Marks, Hustlers and Other Golf Bettors You Can Beat*. The cover showed Sam holding two pigeons. He had an instinctive way with all critters and was a natural wonder himself. Nothing could be more indelible than watching Sam kick the top of a door jamb from a standing start to win a bet, which he could do well into his 80s. He had good genes—his great grandmother lived till 106. Fred Couples may be breaking his age and Bernhard Langer may be the oldest winner on the Champions Tour, but Sam grew old the most gracefully.

When I asked him the secret to longevity and good golf, Snead gave me his stock answer: "If you swing it back short when you're young, you'll never get it back when you're old." And he talked about tempo: "The harder you hit the nail, the slower you take the hammer back." Sam was also known as a teetotaler, but I personally observed him stop at the clubhouse bar during tournament play and order a "daiquiri—extra sweet." Could that have been his secret?

The first celebrity I ever played golf with was Joan Fontaine, the glamorous movie star of the 1940s whose chauffeur drove her to meet me at Winged Foot in a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. She said her secret was to always walk the course: "It's good for your health and your swing." Just last year, Clint Eastwood told me his secret to aging was simply: "I wake up every morning and don't let the old man in. If you think you're old, if you talk about it enough, you will be."

I've been searching ever since the sport psychologist Bob Rotella quoted Satchel Paige to me: "How old would you be if you didn't know how old you was?" This question about aging I've come to ask all my golf buddies, especially doctor friends. What's your secret?

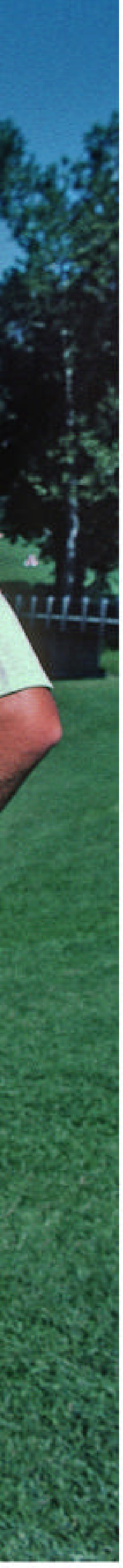
Bill Perocchi has no medical training, but the co-chairman of Pebble Beach Company gave me the best advice that I have the hardest time following: Drink 100 ounces of water, and walk 10,000 steps every day. A new study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association shows that vigorous walking not only extends life but significantly reduces the risk of dementia. (Actually 6,000 to 8,000 steps might be optimal, the equivalent of about 12 holes.)

When I asked Dr. Neal ElAttrache, the lead physician for the Los Angeles Dodgers and Rams, he said: "Avoid carbs and foods that cause inflammation." That's all the stuff we like—sugars, processed snacks, red meat, bread, fried food, soda. I think it was Bette Davis who said, "Old age ain't no place for sissies."

"A happy life is a longer life," says Dr. Phil Ozuah, CEO of Montefiore Medical Center. "The happiest people are grateful. The unhappiest are entitled. Be grateful."

"Approach every day as another opportunity to excel," says Dr. Frank Camissa of the Hospital for Special Surgery. His colleague Dr. David Altchek says, "Always focus on posture" to escape the back pain that shortens a golfer's life. "Eat and drink in moderation and don't ever have smoked," says Dr. Jeff Small, a urologist at Bridgeport Hospital.

I like the two things Dr. Steve Packer, who runs Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, told me. "In the world's Blue Zones, where the largest percentage of people over 100 live, there's a tremendous sense of community and being engaged," he says.



(1) Join a club. Golf is the rare endeavor that allows older men to make friends. (2) Do everything with a purpose—from exercise to hitting a golf shot. Don't just go through the motions.

Dr. Rotella, the author of *Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect*, said he once studied centenarians: "They're all highly committed to something—whatever it is, it should get you up in the morning. They have an optimistic attitude. My father lived till 101, and by then all his classmates were gone, so survival was about staying positive. Keep the legs in shape—it not only helps your golf swing but maintains good balance and prevents falling."

Jerry Tarde is collecting more secrets to longevity and good golf. Send yours to **editor@golfdigest.com.**

If you play golf, you don't need a doctor to tell you: Get a skin cancer exam every year. Use twice as much 30+ SPF sunscreen as you think you need. I skipped my annual at the start of the pandemic and eventually was diagnosed with melanoma on my face, requiring three surgeries, but fortunately it was Stage 0. Golfers need to be extremely vigilant about skin care and medical checkups.

I called my friend Doc Giffin, age 94, who was Arnold Palmer's amanuensis, and asked him what Arnie would say: "Keep hitting golf balls as long as you're able," he replied. It reminded me of Ben Hogan's advice: "Every day you miss practicing takes you two days to get back to where you were." Hogan also said: "Drink ginger ale—it improves the feel in your fingertips" (although I think he preferred gimlets). One other tip from Arnie: "Get the ball to the hole, no matter what."

Spider Miller, legendary Walker Cup captain, told me: "Keep looking through the windshield, not the rear-view mirror." Sam Reeves, the cotton merchant who knows everybody in golf, said: "Be a host in this world, not a guest. Live with urgency. Soak in the beauty of His eternal creation."

Barney Adams, the Texas Golf Hall of Famer, said: "Tee off from the set of tees where you can find the golf course. Leave your ego in the clubhouse."

"Mine is simple," Tom Watson emailed me. "Do the next right thing. Give yourself to people less fortunate than yourself. And have faith in a higher power. Simple, isn't it?"

What else have I learned about long living? There's no excuse for not wearing comfortable shoes. Make your bed in the morning. Take a half-hour nap in the afternoon. Drink a glass of red wine at night—it will improve your disposition and your spouse's. Avoid all ladders and chainsaws. Change your wedges every other year so that you always have sharp grooves. Never follow a bad shot with a dumb shot. When you're going to lay up, lay up. Give and you shall receive.

As is often the case, Nick Price had the most sensible answer to my question: "Spend more time with the people who make you laugh, and always have something to look forward to."

Keep traveling to places you haven't been. I remember Sandy Tatum telling me to make your "circle of life" as wide as possible because one day it'll be a bedroom, and then it'll be a bed.

I think most golfers don't want to die in their sleep. Surrounded by family and friends may sound ideal in theory, but who doesn't envy Bing Crosby's finale: The Associated Press reported that he collapsed after a golf game with three friends on a course in Spain. When reached for comment, his widow, Kathryn Crosby, said: "I can't think of any better way for a golfer who sings for a living to finish a round." She spoke to one of his pals who played with him and remarked. "He told me that Bing had a very good round, and I'd like that to be said."

Maybe the secret to a long life and good golf is knowing when it's over.

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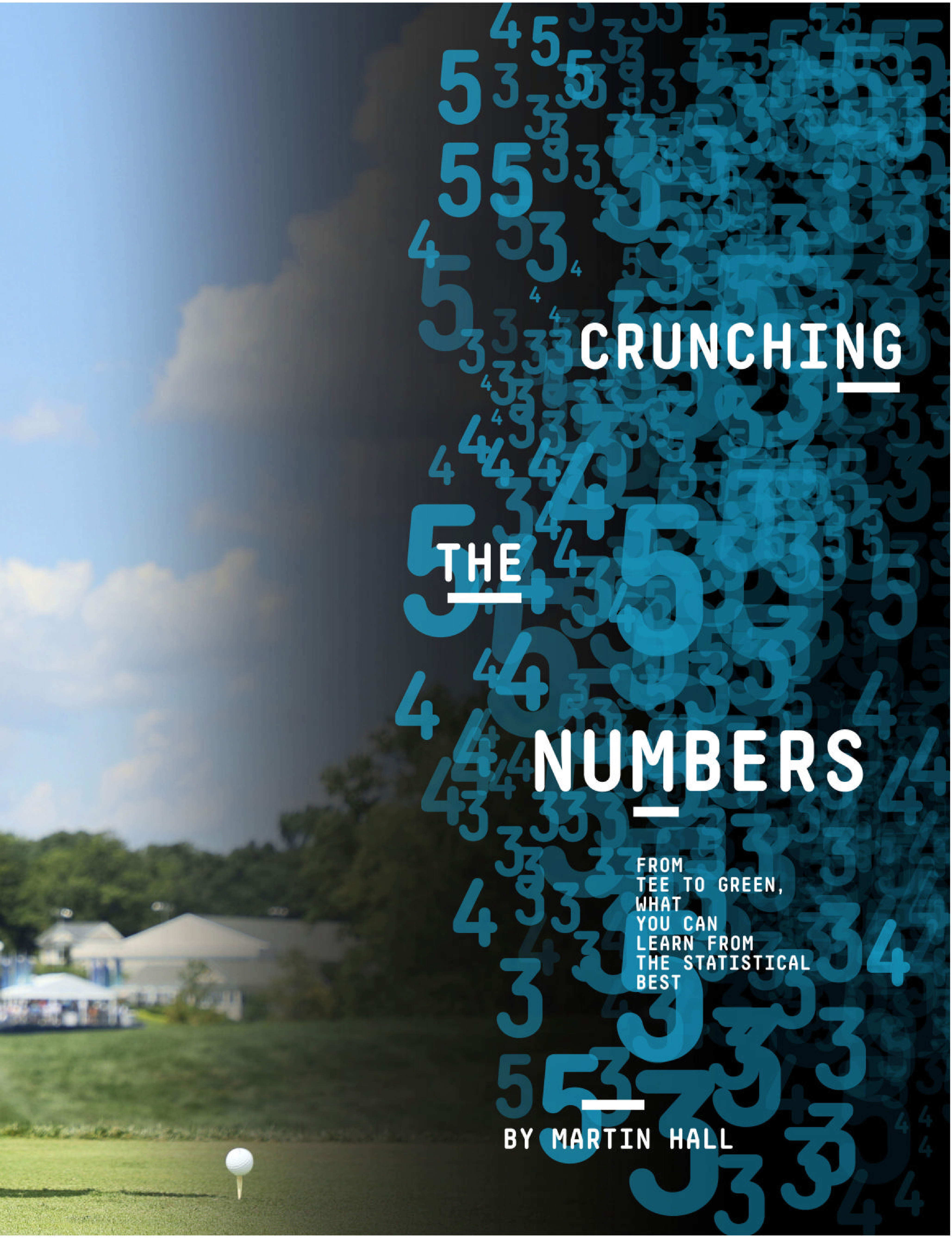
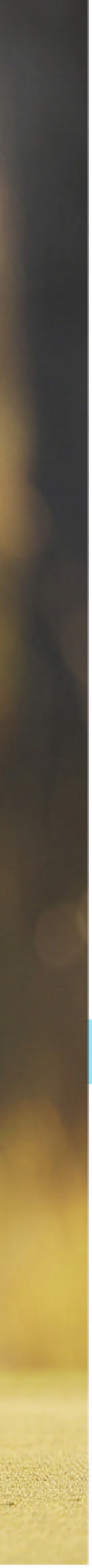


CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

FROM TEE TO GREEN, WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM THE STATISTICAL BEST

BY MARTIN HALL



BEST ALL-AROUND

RORY MCILROY

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
STROKES GAINED/TOTAL (1ST); SG/TEE TO GREEN (2ND);
GREENS IN REGULATION PERCENTAGE (12TH); SG/PUTTING (16TH)

TRAIN IT, THEN TRUST IT

Statistically, it should come as no surprise that Rory McIlroy regained the top spot in the World Golf Ranking in October, as he was in the top 16 on tour in nearly every significant strokes-gained category last year. Always known as an exceptional driver of the ball, Rory made huge strides with his wedge play and putting. After the Masters, McIlroy's proximity from the hole on approaches from 50 to 125 yards improved a staggering 10 feet, leaving the ball on average only 14 feet from the hole. And when there was a putt to be made, he made it. In the final round of the Tour Championship, McIlroy made more than 115 feet of putts and gained 3.92 strokes on the field, fueling a six-shot comeback win against Scottie Scheffler and the rest of the field.

With his putting, the thing I notice is how much freer his stroke is now. This can be attributed to the work he has done with Brad Faxon on the technical side and Dr. Bob Rotella on the mental side. One of the core elements of Rotella's philosophy is that a golfer must train his or her swing and then trust it. In other words, there's a time for conscious thought like focusing on mechanics when you practice, but when it comes time to play, you need to perform in a subconscious state. You need to trust your ability and let it go. That's what Rory is doing—he's not over-controlling his stroke. One other thing he's doing extremely well is that he's not getting into a tizzy if he misses a putt. He shows very little emotion. He confirms whether he missed because of a misread or mis-hit and makes no negative judgments. That's a great playing tip throughout the bag for you—analyze what you can do better and move on.

Player to watch: Xander Schauffele nearly unseated McIlroy for best all-around. He was second in sand saves, third in total driving, seventh in strokes gained/approach the green, eighth in putting average and won three times.

BEST DRIVER

RORY MCILROY

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
DRIVING DISTANCE (2ND);
STROKES GAINED/TEE TO GREEN (2ND); SG/OFF THE TEE (3RD)

RELAX THE TRAIL SHOULDER

In terms of distance and direction, there are few better drivers in the history of the game than McIlroy. Since strokes gained/off the tee was introduced in 2016, Rory has finished no worse than sixth in this stat, including third last season. In that same six-year stretch, he was first or second in driving distance five times, peaking at 321.3 yards off the tee last year.

With Rory's swing, it's all about three things—timing, tension and tempo. The timing comes from the proper sequence of movement from the hips, shoulders, arms and club on the downswing. Tempo relates to the time it takes to swing the club to the top and then back down into the ball. From studying video, Rory and all the other best drivers of the ball have a ratio of 3-to-1 (three units swinging back to one unit coming down). Most amateurs are closer to 4-to-1 or 5-to-1, so the downswing becomes disproportionately faster than the backswing, upsetting the alignment of the clubface at impact.

I've spent a good amount of time with Rory the past few years, and what I found most surprising about his driver swing relates to tension and what he does to free up his swing when he really wants to crank one. Rory has always favored a slight draw, but he doesn't change his aim, ball position or body alignment to create that shape. Instead, he deliberately tries to relax his right arm and shoulder during the transition from backswing to downswing. He says this helps him drop the club inside to create the necessary in-to-out swing path to produce a slight draw off the tee. Loose muscles are faster than tight ones, so the takeaway here is to stay relaxed if you want to hit it farther.

Player to watch: Cameron Young, the tour's rookie of the year, was super long (third in driving distance at 319.3 yards) and clutch. Who can forget Young driving the green on the 72nd hole of the Open at St. Andrews, then making an eagle to temporarily tie for the lead before losing by one to Cameron Smith.

BEST IRON PLAYER

WILL ZALATORIS

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
STROKES GAINED/APPROACH THE GREEN (1ST);
SG/TEE TO GREEN (1ST); GREENS IN REGULATION (8TH)

SWING OUT AND UNDER

My mentor, legendary teacher John Jacobs, said that all great ball-strikers share two common traits—their hips are "out of the way" and their shoulders are "underneath" on the downswing.

No player today better exemplifies this move than Will Zalatoris, who was the only one on tour last season to pick up more than a stroke per round on the field with his approach game. As Zalatoris swings down into the ball, his hips are clearing hard to the left on a fairly level plane, and his right shoulder is moving underneath his left and rotating on a much steeper plane. Picture the shoulders turning like a Ferris wheel and the hips rotating more like a merry-go-round, and that's what you see from Zalatoris and most great iron players.

Why is this move so important? For one, turning the hips out of the way helps quiet the hands and stabilize the clubface through impact. There's no rolling or flipping of the wrists. Secondly, by keeping the right shoulder underneath and the shoulders tilted, the club is able to remain on the desired path into the ball. Most poor ball-strikers tilt their hips and shoulders too much, which causes the clubhead to hit the ground before the ball, or they turn them level and cut across the ball.

To train these moves, stand an iron so the shaft is straight up and rest your lead hand on top of it. Now take your normal address posture, and then toss a ball underhand with your trail hand so it moves under your lead arm. While tossing, rotate your hips so your belt buckle faces the target as you finish. Groove this move, and you'll get the right balance between the planes your hips and shoulders need to move on to strike it pure.

Player to watch: Tom Kim sparked the International team by earning two points at the 2022 Presidents Cup. He also won the PGA Tour's Shriners Children's Open without making a bogey or worse over four rounds. Kim is a great ball-striker and ranked sixth in strokes gained/approach the green and tee to green at the start of this season.

ZALATORIS: GREG SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES; THOMAS AND FITZPATRICK: DAVID CANNON/GETTY IMAGES

BEST WEDGE PLAYER

JUSTIN THOMAS

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
APPROACHES FROM 50-125 YARDS (1ST);
APPROACHES FROM 75-100 YARDS (1ST);
APPROACHES FROM 100-125 YARDS (1ST)

BOW YOUR LEAD WRIST

Justin Thomas has enough length to get to most par 5s in two, but when he doesn't reach, it's sure nice to have his wedge game. He ranked fourth in par-5 scoring average last season (4.47).

What makes him a great wedge player? It starts on the backswing, where he allows his lead forearm to rotate so the club points up. From there, he drags the slightly open face through impact with a bowed lead wrist. I've seen 3-D data of Thomas' wedge swing, and his lead wrist is probably more flexed on the downswing than any other pro. This gives him fantastic face control just before and after impact because it prevents the face from closing at the bottom of the swing.

He has no fear of the ball going left from a shut face, so he can take on tight pins that someone who draws the ball can't—and that's a big advantage.

The other benefit to having the lead wrist slightly bowed is that it produces the optimal ball-turf impact conditions. With your body weight and hand positions slightly more forward of the ball at impact than at address, you can strike it pure and get your wedge shots to check.

As a drill, see how low you can hit your 56-degree wedge without putting the ball back in your stance to do it. This will force you to keep your lead wrist bowed while shifting your hands and weight slightly forward.

Player to watch: Russell Henley was third on tour in fairway approaches from 50 to 125 yards. He also was No. 1 from that distance from the rough and second in strokes gained/approach the green.

BEST SHORT GAME

MATTHEW FITZPATRICK

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
SCRAMBLING (1ST); SCRAMBLING FROM THE ROUGH (1ST);
SAND SAVES (6TH); SG/AROUND THE GREEN (7TH)

LEARN TO HIT THE RIGHT SPOT OVER AND OVER

Most people point to Matthew Fitzpatrick's power surge for his success last season, including winning the U.S. Open. He's 15 yards longer off the tee than he was three years ago, but you don't win that tournament without a great short game. Fitzpatrick picked up 5.65 strokes on the field around the greens at The Country Club.

When I look at my fellow native of England, I see a player who's able to strike the ground in the same spot on his short-game shots. He has magnificent control over that spot, which enables him to hit the center of the clubface consistently. Hit it solid and you can control distance around the greens.

The setup plays a big role in your ability to hit the turf in the same spot. With Fitzpatrick, my impression is that he's looking at the front edge of the ball, not the back of it. I say this because his left eye is slightly lower than his right, and his weight favors his front side. I call this "LEDFOB" (lead eye down, front of the ball). When chipping, he sets up cross-handed or left-hand low, which also lowers the lead eye and shoulder. This allows him to hit down on the ball a few degrees with a consistent low spot after impact. Nobody who's any good with their wedges hits up on the ball, so try this forward-looking approach for better contact.

Player to watch: Shane Lowry, the 2019 Open Champion, has finished in the top 25 in six of his past eight majors largely because of his short game. He was No. 1 in sand saves and proximity from the sand last season and third in scrambling.

BEST PUTTER

LUCAS HERBERT

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
STROKES GAINED/PUTTING (1ST); PUTTING INSIDE 10 FEET (1ST); ONE-PUTT PERCENTAGE (1ST); THREE-PUTT AVOIDANCE (5TH)

DON'T BREAK THE GLASS

This award winner might surprise you, but Lucas has a putting stroke that many pros would like to steal. In watching video of him, including in his win at the Butterfield Bermuda Championship last season, it appears that his grip pressure is very light because the pace of his stroke is so slow and easy. The Aussie's putter just collects the ball—meaning he's letting the putter run into it rather than smashing into it. It reminds me of an image Jack Nicklaus would use to help keep his hands soft through the stroke. He would picture the putter shaft being made out of delicate glass. If he gripped the putter too tight or changed directions too abruptly, he would shatter the glass. That's not a bad thought to have when putting on fast greens or if your rhythm is off.

Another thing I like about Herbert's stroke is its tempo. Like most great putters I've studied, he has a consistent stroke ratio of 2-to-1—like thinking the words *one thousand* going back and *one* moving into the ball. His follow-through also is about a third longer than his backswing—or 40 percent going back, 60 percent coming through. It's what the best putters do. Nicklaus' follow-through was always longer than his backstroke—same as Tiger Woods—which is good enough for me. You don't want to have any deceleration in your stroke, and a longer follow-through is good evidence of that.

Player to watch: Sam Burns, a three-time winner on the PGA Tour last season, was making putts from seemingly everywhere at the Presidents Cup. He ranked fifth in putting average in 2022 and was 10th in strokes gained/putting.

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BEST SCORER

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

KEY 2022 STATS (PGA TOUR RANK)
BIRDIE AVERAGE (2ND); SUB-PAR ROUNDS (2ND);
ROUNDS IN THE 60S (3RD); SCORING AVERAGE (4TH)

FINISH HIGH TO HIT IT HIGH

Between the WM Phoenix Open and the Masters last year, Scheffler won four times in six events with 10 rounds in the 60s. A big reason he's so successful is his ability to hit the ball higher than most. It allows him to get at pins that a lot of players can't access.

To hit it high, first check your address position. I like my students to have the feeling that their left ear is behind the ball with their weight evenly distributed. Then you need to generate a fair amount of clubhead speed to hoist the ball up, which requires a full backswing and a lot of wrist hinge. You won't see Scheffler playing a lot of half-swing, touchy-feely knockdown shots because nearly everything with him is intended to produce a high ball flight.

The finish is just as important to hitting it high as the backswing. You want to feel like you're almost wrapping your hands behind your neck. You can't hit it high with an abbreviated follow-through. Your hands must finish high. It's also a mistake to think that you need to hit down on the ball to make it go way up. That just increases your chance of a mis-hit. Instead, set up more behind the ball and complete your backswing and follow-through with a high-hands finish.

Player to watch: Tony Finau posted scores in the 60s in 23 of 28 rounds late last season, including 13 in a row. He was 43 under par in consecutive wins at the 3M Open and Rocket Mortgage Classic.

Martin Hall is one of Golf Digest's 50 Best Teachers in America. He is the director of instruction at The Club at Ibis in West Palm Beach, Fla., and host of "School of Golf" on GolfPass and Golf Channel.

HERBERT: ANDREW REDINGTON/GETTY IMAGES; SCHEFFLER: DAVID CANNON/GETTY IMAGES

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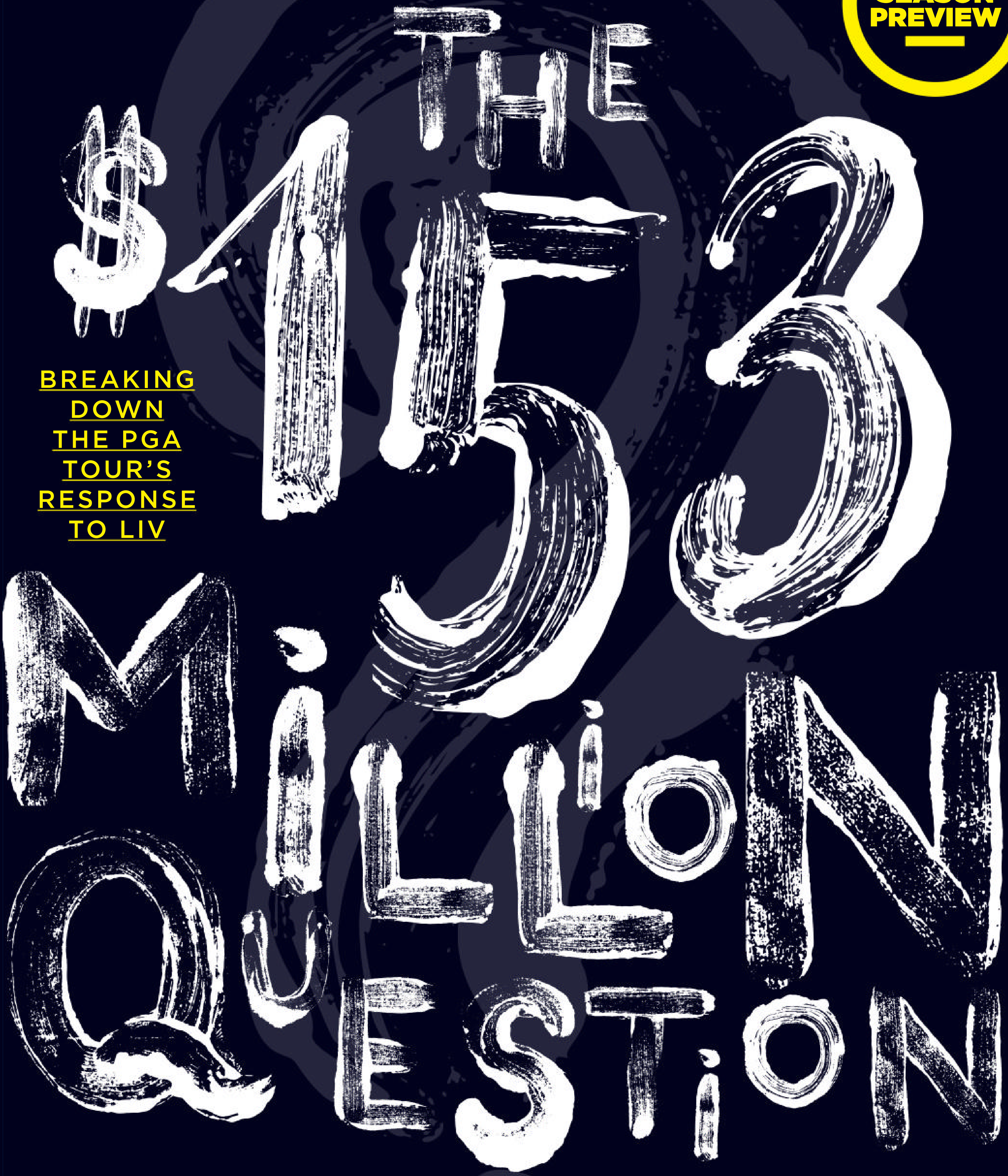
*Longest forged iron claim based on robot testing using Apex DCB iron vs. Paradym iron.

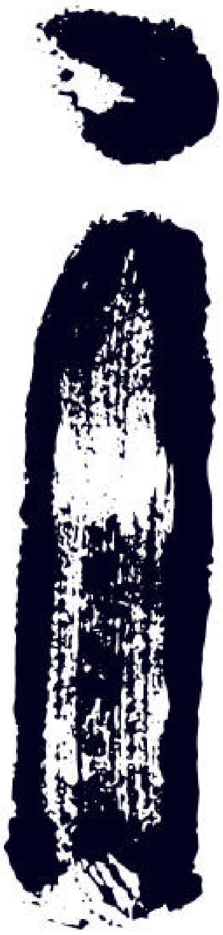
2023 SEASON PREVIEW



THE $153 MILLION QUESTION

BREAKING DOWN THE PGA TOUR'S RESPONSE TO LIV

BY JARED DOERFLER / ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID JUNKIN



IF THE LIV GOLF BRAIN TRUST PUT TARGETS ON ITS MOST DESIRED defectors, Jon Rahm would be bigger than most. An international star who supports the PGA Tour and DP World Tour, Ryder Cup stalwart and under-30 major-championship winner with two decades of competitive runway in front of him, Rahm would bring cachet—and the remaining years of major exemptions that come from his 2021 U.S. Open win.

Rahm is curt and direct, however, when he says he's not for sale: "If money was on my mind, I probably might have gone to LIV, right? If money's your goal, that's clearly the path to go down. Every decision I make is based on becoming the best player I can become."

Players like Rahm, Rory McIlroy, Tiger Woods and Scottie Scheffler also have been outspoken about their support for the PGA Tour's competitive framework and legacy over LIV's open checkbook.

Thanks to an unprecedented infusion of cash into the PGA Tour ecosystem for 2023, they won't exactly be dealing with financial hardship by staying loyal. The PGA Tour's new compensation program—designed in direct response to the continued threat of LIV poaching PGA Tour stars—splashes more than $150 million into play this year. Most of it will end up in the hands of the most established stars who support the premier events. This is what the new program looks like—and how it will change the complexion of tournament golf.

WHAT IS THE PGA TOUR CHANGING FOR 2023?

If it has a dollar sign attached to it, it's probably changing. The PGA Tour is injecting $153 million into player payouts for prize-money increases and the Player Impact Program. This will come mostly in the form of more lucrative tournament purses in 13 "designated" events—which include the Sentry Tournament of Champions, the WM Phoenix Open, the Players Championship, the World Golf Championships-Dell Match Play, the RBC Heritage, the Wells Fargo Championship, the Travelers Championship, three player invitationals and three FedEx Cup playoff events. Purse sizes for these events will be $15 million to $25 million. For context, the largest purse outside the Players and majors in 2022 was $15 million at the FedEx Cup playoff events.

According to PGA Tour models and analysis, the player who finishes 30th in the FedEx Cup standings in 2023 will earn $7 million, including bonus money. Last year, K.H. Lee earned $3.85 million in that spot. The 70th-place player is projected to earn $3.5 million—up from the $2.15 million Matt Jones earned there last year. Those are increases of 82 and 62 percent, respectively.

At the top? Scheffler played 25 tournaments and won four times in 2022, good for $14 million. His wins in Phoenix and at Bay Hill alone would have paid him a combined $3.5 million more in 2023. A comparable season in 2023 would pay him in the neighborhood of $25 million—or the going rate for a mid-range NFL quarterback or a No. 2 starter in Major League Baseball. Dustin Johnson by comparison earned $35.6 million in tournament prize money playing for LIV in 2022.

Another part of the cash infusion is going to directly counter one of the LIV perks that has gotten a lot of positive buzz: Covering travel expenses for members of a player's entourage. Any rookie or player returning from a three-year absence will receive $500,000 in upfront cash for expenses that will count as an advance on season earnings. All players who don't earn $500,000 will get reimbursed for the difference at the end of the season. Any nonexempt player who makes the field in an event and misses the cut will earn $5,000—which will help defray travel and caddie costs.

The new schedule works with the two most prominent bonus programs on the PGA Tour: The FedEx Cup playoffs and the Player Impact Program. The FedEx Cup is the season-ending string of three events that determines the season champion—and the winner of an $18-million bonus. The PIP debuted in 2021 and is designed to provide bonus cash to the players who move the tour's attention and financial needles the most. The players who finished in the top 20 of the previous year's PIP are obligated to play in all the elevated events for which they are eligible (with one opt out)—or they lose 75 percent of the bonus cash.

The PIP program is remaining a $100-million split among the 20 most recognizable players, but it will be scored differently. Social-media presence used to give some players a leg up (like Phil Mickelson, who finished second to Woods in 2021), but the new criteria will focus on Web searches, media mentions and consumer awareness in random surveys. "It's for the people who are selling the tickets and the ones that NBC, CBS and all the networks want to make the TV deals for," says Justin Thomas. Woods earned $15 million in PIP money in a season in which he played just nine competitive rounds. McIlroy finished second and earned $12 million, and Spieth collected $9 million for finishing third.

The upshot? If you're a popular, successful player, you're in line to play in a lot of big-money events that will give you more chances to earn money, fame and glory.

A LOT OF PLAYERS ARE WINNING. ARE THERE ANY LOSERS?

For the players at the top of the pyramid, it's an enormous payday, but the picture gets cloudier for the "middle class." Remember the Matt Jones example? The number 70 is important because after

that spot the math changes—to a potentially dramatic degree. Instead of the top 125 making the playoffs and guaranteeing status for the next year, only 70 will qualify. That leaves more than 50 players to fight it out with roughly the next 100 guys on the money list plus potential risers from the Korn Ferry Tour and college players who could come through in a new direct-to-the-tour program. That "middle class" will fill the non-elevated events and get spot starts in the big-money tournaments—leaving them at a disadvantage trying to climb back into the top 70. When PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan announced the change in June, he characterized it as one of the biggest on a roster full of bombshell revelations—but one that would ensure competitive fields and compelling storylines in the non-elevated events. "To say everybody supports this move would be an exaggeration, but it's the right move for the business, and it's the right move for our players and fans," Monahan said. "Every single member who carries a PGA Tour card has the ability to be the No. 1 player in the world. It's less about where you are today and more about where the ultimate opportunity is."

PGA Tour Policy Board member James Hahn cast the only dissenting vote on the new structure, saying the stipends were small change in comparison to the benefits a small group of elite players will get under the new guidelines. Hahn said sarcastically, "Seems like a good compromise for both the top and bottom—$100 million for the top 20 players on the PIP and $5,000 for non-exempt players on tour."

WHERE IS ALL THIS NEW MONEY COMING FROM?

Indirectly and eventually? The fans. The PGA Tour is a $1.5-billion business that earns the majority of its revenue from five categories—tournament revenue ($660 million), domestic and international media rights ($634 million), Tournament Players Clubs ($142 million), corporate licensing ($65 million) and investments ($21 million). Tournament revenue entails sponsorship deals with the brands you see listed before or after the names of a tournament—like the WM Phoenix Open or the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard—and ticket sales. Media rights are the deals the tour cuts with networks to broadcast tournaments on television. The Tournament Players Clubs are the more than 30 public and private courses worldwide under the TPC umbrella—ranging from TPC Sawgrass (home of the Players Championship) to TPC Dorado Beach in Puerto Rico. Corporate licensing is revenue the tour makes for selling the right to use its logo (or player imagery) on anything from shirts to trading cards. Investment income is how the tour's funds are performing in the market, just like your 401(k).

In 2022, the tour paid $685 million to players in the form of purses, bonuses, health insurance and various other perks. It also transferred $153 million collected from sponsors to players in endorsement money. It spent $716 million to run its operations—$212 million for tournament expenses, $183 million on staff salaries and $132 million for the TPC network. The infusion of new bonus money produced a $32-million shortfall for 2022—which the tour covered with money from its $225-million "rainy day" reserve fund.

In 2023, the tour will need to find a way to cover the $153 million in new player payouts. As a 501(c)(6) non-profit, non-stock corporation, it can't take

IF YOU'RE A POPULAR, SUCCESSFUL PLAYER, YOU'RE IN LINE TO EARN MORE MONEY, FAME AND GLORY.

on other forms of outside investment. That means it will need to make more money from its existing revenue sources. Some will come in the form of annual escalators—payment bumps—in its existing media deals with CBS, NBC and ESPN, which run through 2030. (*Editor's note: Golf Digest is owned by Warner Bros. Discovery, which holds global media rights to the PGA Tour outside the United States.*) The difference can be made up largely through advertising, but it's possible the networks could pass on some costs to viewers in the form of more expensive carriage agreements with cable providers and streaming fees.

Despite the argument the overall value of PGA Tour events has been weakened by top-player defections, it would be naive to think title sponsors for tour events (the price tag starts at about $15 million) won't be asked to throw in more cash—especially when the tour has made it clear that elevated status is a year-by-year designation. There's a reason why the 750,000 beers sold annually at the WM Phoenix Open cost $9 each and won't be less next year. Who knows, perhaps increases in green fees at some of the public-access TPC courses could help their cause, although there might not be much oxygen above the $800 TPC Sawgrass gets for a peak-season time.

Another revenue source? If you've heard Woods and McIlroy talk up their new TMRW Sports venture in press conferences at PGA Tour events, there's a good reason. TMRW's golf league launches in 2024 and will feature six teams of PGA Tour players competing on simulators in front of arenas filled with fans. The PGA Tour has an equity stake, as does a raft of celebrities and famous athletes from other sports. If the league makes money through the ticket sales and sponsorship dollars, the tour wins. There's no "if" about it for players like Rahm and Thomas, who will get paid to mix it up in the new interactive format. "If done properly, it could be a home run for all of us," Rahm says, "not only for us players but for the audience as well."

IS PHIL MICKELSON'S CLAIM THAT THE PGA TOUR IS SITTING ON A "SLUSH FUND" AND KEEPING IT FROM PLAYERS TRUE?

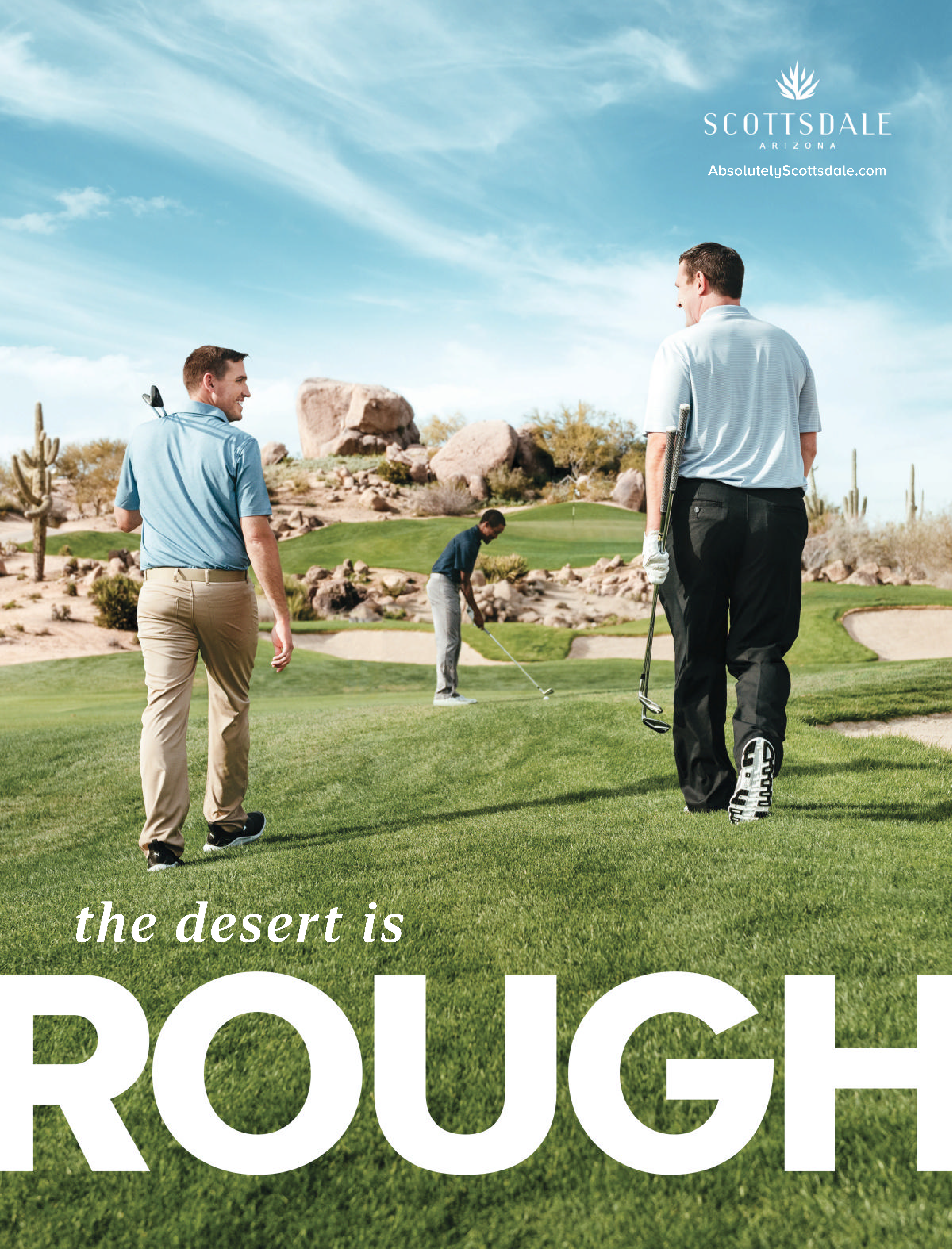
Not really. Mickelson tweeted a list of figures he said was from the tour's Form 990 in 2018—the tax return non-profits have to submit to the IRS. His list implied the tour has $1.6 billion in stocks and $700 million in cash on hand. The tour does have $1.48 billion in investments, but the vast majority of that—$1.18 billion—is part of the tour's lucrative player-pension program. Revenue from those investments will pay current and future players who qualify for what many consider the best retirement plan in sports. The tour pays into a deferred compensation plan for each cut a player makes, with a percentage of any end-of-season FedEx Cup bonus money. A player fully vests in the plan by making 150 cuts in his career and is 50 percent vested after 75 made cuts. In 2021, 500 players had more than $500,000 in their accounts, and 114 had more than $3 million. McIlroy earned $18 million for winning the 2022 FedEx Cup, $1 million of which went into his pension account. It isn't unreasonable to estimate that dozens of current players will retire with tens of millions available to them at age 50, or when they stop competing full time in PGA Tour or PGA Tour Champions events.

Subtract the tour's pension obligation and that leaves $300 million in stock as of 2018—which is what Monahan said was the tour's reserve fund before the pandemic. Still, one thrust of Mickelson's comments since leaving for LIV is hard to dispute. The tour found the funds to accelerate planned purse increases and paid out more of its revenue as a percentage to players because of competition from LIV.

> DOZENS OF CURRENT PLAYERS WILL RETIRE WITH TENS OF MILLIONS AVAILABLE TO THEM AT AGE 50.

A question that remains, of course, is will it be enough?

Jared Doerfler writes a newsletter on golf and business at perfectputt.substack.com.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BEST IN SHOW Justin Thomas (left) and Jordan Spieth are two of the star players featured in the new Netflix series, "Full Swing."

ME

HOW THE UPCOMING NETFLIX DOCUSERIES CAPTURES WHAT LIFE IS LIKE ON THE PGA TOUR

BY SHANE RYAN

The standard for any access-based sports documentary has to be "Formula 1: Drive to Survive," which debuted on Netflix in 2019 and has become a top-10 show in 56 countries for the streaming service. The ripple effects for a relatively niche sport have been staggering. The United States is now the biggest market for F1 online merchandise sales, and viewership is up 40 percent.

Now it's golf's turn.

"Full Swing," the eight-episode series documenting a year in professional golf, debuts Feb. 15 on Netflix. If the creators were ever worried about a dull season, the emergence of LIV Golf tempered those fears. It might be hyperbolic to suggest that the show will transform professional golf, but there is a chance, at least, that golf could become a cultural sensation by the time the boys tee it up at Augusta National in April.

On the Saturday of the FedEx St. Jude Classic last August, I met a small crew from "Full Swing" who arrived in Memphis to cover the rookie-of-the-year race. Cameron Young was the favorite, but players like Sahith Theegala and Mito Pereira still had hope, and all three were in the field at the PGA Tour's first playoff event. Mary Stamm-Clarke, a freelance producer for Vox Media Studios, which is filming "Full Swing" for Netflix, had the job of following Theegala on the front nine with her production assistant, Patrick Rodgers. They knew from experience that Muralidhar Theegala, Sahith's father, would happily wear a microphone while he followed his son. Sure enough, he was rarely silent that day, chatting with anyone in the vicinity. When he high-fived a fan, Rodgers drove up in his cart with a release for the man to sign.

Late on the front nine, Rodgers spotted Michael Beard, the head men's golf coach at Pepperdine. Theegala had won every national player-of-the-year award while playing for Beard in 2020, and the crew wanted him to wear a microphone, too. He wasn't so eager. "I'm just here to cheer him on," he told Rodgers. "I want this to be about him."

As if by instinct, Stamm-Clarke appeared at his side. "That's all we want," she said, pleasant and reassuring, but also conveying the inevitability of his acquiescence. "We just want it to be about him." Even as she spoke, she was preparing the microphone, and soon it was clipped to his shirt—he was now part of the show. After complimenting Stamm-Clarke on her powers of persuasion, I wondered what came next. "Now you let it breathe," she said.

Stamm-Clarke, originally from London, had worked with Vox previously on shows about surfing and tennis, and she knew her way around people. Beard walked alone for another hole before Stamm-Clarke approached again to ask if he would join Theegala's father. There was no need to ask him to talk; if he was around Muralidhar, that would be inevitable. He obliged and soon fell into the conversational orbit.

As I found out later, this hustle was in vain, and nothing from that day was used in the final cut. Still, it was a fascinating insight into how this docuseries is made. The producers refuse to stage anything or to ask for second takes of organic moments, but they do occasionally feed conversational topics to their subjects. Mostly, though, the team's job is to be the invisible observers through the long hours, punctuated by moments of frenetic preparation—like dropping everything to visit a player's house when he finally gives the OK or jetting off to Detroit, as producer Dan Wilson and his crew had done two weeks earlier, when Tony Finau, one of the show's featured players, was on the verge of winning the Rocket Mortgage Classic.

BEHIND THE SCENES Brooks Koepka and putting coach Jeff Pierce get in some practice (right); Cameron Young, PGA Tour Rookie of the Year for 2022 (below).

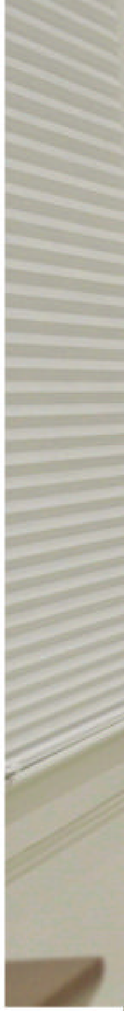
One of the title options Netflix rejected for the show was "The Long Game." It would have been thematically appropriate for how the crew operated—being there, relentlessly, until lightning struck. If lightning struck enough times throughout the year, the team might have enough material for a storyline, an episode, or even a whole season of TV.

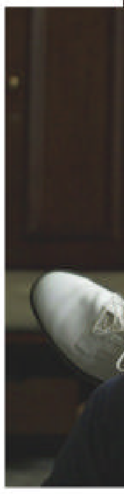
Chad Mumm, chief creative officer at Vox and the lead producer of "Full Swing," said the show has been in the works for a long time. As far back as 2014, when he was running Vox's ad agency, he met with the PGA Tour in Ponte Vedra Beach to pitch an SB Nation-style team community. The tour chose a different partner instead, but its media team loved Mumm's pitch, which included an original series. They stayed in touch and played golf together each year at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. The timing was finally right in 2019; by the end of their round at Shadow Creek, they had hashed out an informal plan of how the deal would work, and Mumm had exclusive rights and a signed deal later that spring. "Chad's pitch was, 'It's got to be truthful,' " said Chris Wandell, the tour's vice president of media-business development. " 'Whatever we do, whoever provides access, it's got to be real. It can't be an infomercial for the PGA Tour.' "

To sell the show, Mumm needed players, and he started that process in April at Augusta National. He didn't have a pass to get near the famous oak tree where the VIPs mingle, so he printed out the name and picture of every agent for every player he wanted to sign, studied the pages as he stood against the ropes and waited for them to appear.

His biggest hindrance was that he couldn't pay anyone, but he could offer exposure and the ability for the player to dictate the extent of Netflix's access. That was enough to sign Rickie Fowler, Tony Finau and Justin Thomas. ("Signing," in this case, grants Netflix the rights to use the footage shot off the course, like in a locker room or at a player's home. The player determines his level of participation, but signing signals a willingness to give Netflix access.)

Every player I spoke to, from Finau to Joel Dahmen to Max Homa to Matt Fitzpatrick to Theegala, said he was a fan of "Drive to Survive," and having that point of reference for the potentially career-altering benefits made it easy for them to commit. By the summer of 2020, Netflix had emerged as the primary suitor, and Mumm turned his attention to the majors. Once again, he started at Augusta National, and Wandell was critical to this process: "We're doing it for the sport, not for us," Wandell told the governing bodies, and to Mumm's surprise, the reception at Augusta National was positive. By 2021, Augusta was on board, and so was Netflix.





PREVIOUS PAGES: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY GLUKIT

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NETFLIX

KOEPKA REVEALED HE WOULD LAY IN BED AT NIGHT UNABLE TO SLEEP, GRIPPING AN IMAGINARY GOLF CLUB, AGONIZING ABOUT HIS GAME.

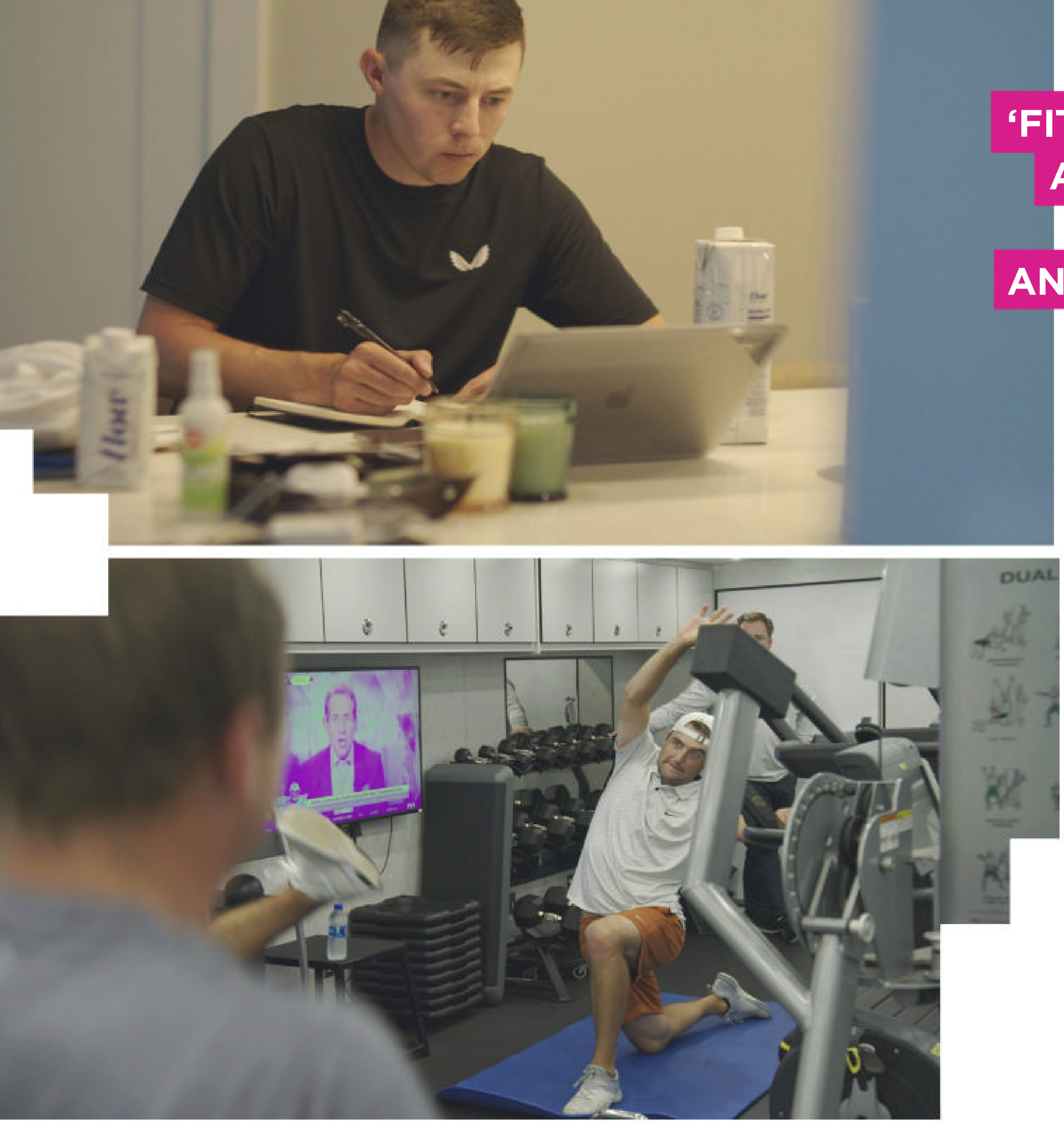
The crew began what would become a yearlong effort in late 2021 at Tiger's Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas. With additional big names like Brooks Koepka agreeing to participate, the first interviews were conducted. Crucially, these were audio only. "We found that if you stick a camera in their face, they go into media-training mode," Mumm said. "It just kind of clicks into the same platitudes. If you take the camera away, and you just set a mic on the table, their whole posture changes, and it's just a conversation."

The audio will be used over B-roll footage, and to the viewer, it's indistinguishable from filmed interviews. It's an ingenious method of mining material that a player might not divulge in front of a camera. The technique proved so successful that it was used to explore controversial topics such as LIV Golf. Lose the camera, and the words flowed.

One of the players they interviewed at the Hero World Challenge was Fitzpatrick. He wasn't part of the original plan for the series, but Vox already had Thomas and Collin Morikawa from Excel Sports Management, and Mark Steinberg, agent to Tiger Woods, encouraged the film crew to give Fitzpatrick a look. When Vox signed him, it was almost as a favor to Excel, which had been supportive of the show from the start. "Fitzpatrick comes in and sits down for his interview," Mumm recalled, "and we were like, *Oh, my God*."

Part of their astonishment was with Fitzpatrick's analytical approach. The team was used to interacting with golfers who were competitive to their core and exuded swagger. Fitzpatrick, obsessed with the data points he meticulously keeps on every aspect of his game, was studious by comparison. In his matter-of-fact way, he explained how his numbers showed incremental improvement and how that grind would inevitably pay off even against the best players. He became one of the show's best stories when he won the 2022 U.S. Open.

The one player who didn't even bother to bring his agent to the studio was Koepka. He drove there alone, stayed for 90 minutes and was more vulnerable than anyone expected. At one point, he spoke about the perception that he doesn't



SCENE-STEALERS Matthew Fitzpatrick (top) and Scottie Scheffler have major storylines.

> **‘FITZPATRICK COMES IN AND SITS DOWN FOR HIS INTERVIEW, AND WE WERE LIKE, *OH, MY GOD.*’**

care and was adamant that he did—a lot. At night, he told them, he would lie in bed next to his wife, Jena, unable to sleep, gripping an imaginary golf club and agonizing about his game. All he thinks about, he told them, is golf—even at 2 a.m.

At that point, Mumm shared a look with Paul Martin, the co-founder of Box to Box Films, the producer of “Drive to Survive,” and they had the same thought: *Holy shit. We’ve got a show.*

The crew’s first full field event was at Torrey Pines in January 2022, but the first time they ever shot golf happened because of a happy accident. In Hawaii, Joel Dahmen had tweeted that he and Harry Higgs would face a team to be named later on Jan. 24 at a course called Goat Hill Park the week of Torrey. Netflix tagged along to find Dahmen with a bag of White Claws and dozens of fans waiting for him. “It was this six-man scramble, the kids were freakin’ ringers, and it was this awesome, sunset vibe,” Mumm said. “That was our first shoot, and we just thought, *Golf needs this. It needs the anti-country club.*”

That day formed the backbone for an episode, and though Dahmen worried he would be cast in the role of a “clown,” he believed the crew came to understand the nature of the relationship between himself, his wife, Lona, and his caddie, Geno Bonnalie. Soon, cameras were everywhere, including a Taco Tuesday night at their home, and when I joked with Dahmen that they kept coming back because the other golfers were too bland, he laughed. “I think that’s exactly what happened,” he said. “Like, we’re going to go film this guy, and suddenly it’s like, nobody wants to watch that. So it was back to me and Geno—best friends who play golf and laugh at each other because we get to do this for a living.”

Dahmen was comfortable with granting full access, but others drew boundaries. Homa declined a home visit the week of the Genesis Invitational at Riviera. Theegala, who describes himself as an “aggressive introvert” in a family full of extroverts, had similar reservations. “My family gets energy from people, and I’ve always been awkward and not wanting to talk to people,” he said. “I still get nervous and have anxiety about any kind of social interaction.”

He made his parents—immigrants from India who poured much of their modest income into Sahith’s development and who, according to Muralidhar, faced incidents of racism along the way—promise not to say anything too embarrassing. After Theegala failed to close out potential wins with the cameras around, his caddie, Carl Smith, gave the crew a hard “no” at the BMW Championship as Theegala attempted to qualify for the Tour Championship.

Tony Finau’s background is similar in some ways to Theegala’s—immigrant parents and little family money—but he leaned more toward Dahmen’s perspective. It helped that Finau’s agent, Chris Armstrong, was a major F1 fan and knew what to expect. “I was open for the challenge and exposure,” Finau said. “The good thing for me is that I’m different, my background is different, my journey’s different. I have five kids; I come from a huge family. I have a whole different perspective, and people are going to see that right away.”

For Netflix, the good luck that began at Goat Hill continued when Justin Thomas won the PGA Championship. Thomas’ father, Mike, became a central figure because of the complex dynamic of being both coach and parent. Early in the week at Southern Hills, Justin struggled with swing issues and admitted that he often gets “pissed” at his dad for being too soft as a coach. This complicated relationship paid off in a big way when the crew was embedded with Team Thomas in the tense moments before he defeated Will Zalatoris in a playoff. (The PGA Championship was a fertile weekend for Netflix, which had also signed Pereira, who lost his chance to win with a double bogey on the 72nd hole and was consoled in the park-

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FAMILY LIFE Tony Finau, with his wife, Alayna, and daughter Sienna-Vee, was an eager participant.

‘I HAVE A WHOLE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, AND PEOPLE ARE GOING TO SEE THAT RIGHT AWAY.’

ing lot afterward by a group of his fellow Latino players.)

At least one signing happened almost by accident. At the 2021 U.S. Open, Mumm had a long meeting with Bryson DeChambeau’s agent, Brett Falkoff, to secure his participation. That never panned out, but at a nearby table, Ian Poulter looked at his phone and pretended indifference, long after he had finished eating. When the meeting ended, Mumm decided he had nothing to lose and introduced himself. Poulter was happy to talk and told the Netflix team that if they were making “Drive to Survive” for golf, he was their man. Poulter would become an important figure when he made the transition to LIV Golf. He wrestled with the decision, and this struggle is apparent in the show.

Early discussions with Rory McIlroy, who would end the year ranked No. 1 in the world, yielded an unsatisfying compromise: McIlroy would likely be in for a second season of the show but didn’t want to be a full participant the first season. As the year went along, though, the crew noticed he kept appearing in their shots to the point that it seemed like he wanted to be on camera. At the Open Championship, a series producer pitched him again. McIlroy reiterated that he hadn’t signed, so Mumm offered a compromise: “You’ve been around our cameras the whole time,” he said, “so what if we just film you, and you tell us if it’s too much?”

They filmed him all week at St. Andrews, through the heartbreaking loss to Cam Smith, and he never balked at the presence of cameras. The problem was the loss; it was understood that if he won, he would sign on, but when the narrative changed, the reluctance returned, and that cast doubt on whether Netflix could use the footage.

That’s when Mumm decided to throw a Hail Mary. He flew to the Tour Championship in Atlanta and arrived at the clubhouse early Monday morning, hoping to score a private meeting with McIlroy. Mumm was meandering around the hallways, reflecting on the futility of the mission, when he saw McIlroy eating breakfast by himself in player dining. Mumm approached, was invited to sit, and gave his five-minute pitch: You’re the de facto spokesman for the PGA Tour, you’ve got a major platform, and it might never be this important again.

“I’m in,” McIlroy said. Three hours later, they signed an agreement.

McIlroy would become a critical part of how Netflix tells the story of LIV Golf. In the documentary, he holds hushed, seemingly private conversations with other players, all with a camera less than five feet away and a boom mic hanging above his head. At times, the content seemed so personal that the crew offered to back off, only to have McIlroy insist they stay. In addition, having McIlroy on board gave them the inside access to the secret meeting of players he organized with Tiger Woods at the BMW Championship.

Netflix maintained its ties with the featured players who went to LIV, too, including Koepka, Poulter and Dustin Johnson. A crew traveled to the first LIV event in London. Although initially ambivalent about whether the LIV story had been “good” for the documentary, Mumm believes it created tension, and tension creates a story. All the producers had to do was show the player decisions in real time, whether the players came off as sympathetic or not. One of the episodes, Mumm says, will focus extensively on the LIV drama, but it’s a theme that runs throughout the series, and he predicts that even hardcore golf fans will be surprised by their access.

As the heat picked up in Memphis that August morning and Stamm-Clarke followed Theegala, Mumm made it a point to find Scottie Scheffler on the putting green to secure a home visit before they wrapped shooting for the year. By the clubhouse, producer Dan Wilson, tall and athletically built, filmed Pereira in his workout trailer. Wilson was obviously comfortable with the players, and he told me that the moment he knew he was “in” came when a grinning Scheffler shoved him as he passed by in the locker room—one jock’s token of affection for another.

The goal was to wrap shooting at the Tour Championship in August, but they wound up going two months longer, concluding at the end of October when they shot with, among others, Paulina Gretzky. By then, Mumm felt “excited and exhausted.” I asked about the pressure—this was his creation and maybe the most personal project of his career.

“It’s hard at every single point,” he said. “You’ve got to build the trust, the access; you’ve got to make sure you’re there, that your cameras are there, that things are in focus. Then you get it all in, and you think, *How do we make this into a story? How do you make the energy and emotion come out?* The stakes are so high because it’s the first non-‘Drive to Survive’ show made for Netflix, and it’s golf.

“It’s terrifying,” he said. “It has to be awesome.”

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Golf Digest

HOT
LIST
2023

134
UNBIASED CLUB REVIEWS

OUR ANNUAL HOT LIST GUIDE TURNS 20

GOLF DIGEST'S YEARLONG SEARCH FOR THE GAME'S BEST CLUBS PRODUCED THE MOST IMPRESSIVE HOT LIST EVER. WHY? BECAUSE THESE 134 WINNERS ARE THAT GOOD. TRUST US

▸ **When we launched this golf-equipment** evaluation enterprise 20 years ago, we said the buying process should *start* with the Golf Digest Hot List. For the team that puts it together, it's an unwavering commitment to providing a comprehensive guide that makes the golf-club universe intelligible for you, and it takes us nearly a year to get it right. Multiply that by 20 and you have the knowledge behind this year's list. The two lead editors responsible for the Hot List have each been covering equipment for the past 30 years. They live for moment of inertia, carbon-composite fibers and artificial-intelligence algorithms, meeting with R&D folks of every level to find, as we said in 2004, "the clubs you should try right now." Our 20th Hot List, fueled by three weeks of research and testing at Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club in Maricopa, Ariz., has 134 winners that are universally better than they have ever been. ▸

WANT THE FULL HOT LIST ISSUE WITH EXPANSIVE REVIEWS OF EVERY WINNER IN ALL CLUB CATEGORIES? It's all free on our website! Golf Digest subscribers can also access the digital edition or visit golfdigest.com/thehotlistissue to order a physical magazine (*see cover, left*). Enter the code HOTLIST2023 for 30 percent off the newsstand price of $12.99. You'll get bonus reads like our golf-club Hall of Fame.

TO SEE THE WINNERS, TURN THE PAGE AND OPEN THE GATEFOLD.

Home of the Hot List

GOLF GALAXY | DICK'S SPORTING GOODS

HD
STEALTH
TaylorMade
SPEED POCKET
STEALTH 2
PING
CARBONWOOD
STEALTH 2
60% CARBON TWISTFACE
FADE
TUNGSTEN
DRAW
PING

HOT LIST 2023: THE WINNERS

OUR 20TH ANNUAL EQUIPMENT REVIEW FEATURES 134 GOLD AND SILVER MEDALISTS. FIND IT ONLINE AND IN OUR SPECIAL ISSUE

DRIVERS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Paradym/Paradym X/Paradym ♦♦♦
- **COBRA**
  Aerojet/Aerojet LS/Aerojet Max
- **MIZUNO**
  ST-Z 230/ST-X 230/PLTNM
- **PING**
  G430 Max/G430 SFT/G430 LST/G430 HL
- **SRIXON**
  ZX7/ZX5/ZX5 LS (Mk II)
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth 2/Stealth 2 Plus/Stealth 2 HD
- **TITLEIST**
  TSR1/TSR2/TSR3/TSR4
- **PXG**
  0211
- **TOUR EDGE**
  Exotics C723/E723
- **WILSON**
  Dynapwr/Dynapwr Carbon

FAIRWAY WOODS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Paradym/Paradym X/Paradym ♦♦♦
- **COBRA**
  Aerojet/Aerojet Max/Aerojet LS
- **MIZUNO**
  ST-Z 230
- **PING**
  G430 Max/G430 SFT
- **SRIXON**
  ZX Mk II
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth 2 Plus
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth 2/Stealth 2 HD
- **TITLEIST**
  TSR1/TSR2/TSR2+/TSR3
- **CLEVELAND**
  Launcher XL Halo
- **HONMA**
  TW757
- **PXG**
  0211
- **TOUR EDGE**
  Exotics C723/E723
- **WILSON**
  Dynapwr

HYBRIDS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Apex/Apex Pro
- **CALLAWAY**
  Paradym/Paradym X
- **COBRA**
  Aerojet
- **COBRA**
  King Tec
- **PING**
  G430
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth 2/Stealth 2 Plus/Stealth 2 HD
- **TITLEIST**
  TSR1/TSR2/TSR3
- **MIZUNO**
  ST-Z 230
- **PXG**
  0211
- **SRIXON**
  ZX Mk II
- **TOUR EDGE**
  Exotics C723/E723
- **WILSON**
  Dynapwr

PLAYERS IRONS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Apex Pro 21
- **COBRA**
  King CB
- **COBRA**
  King Tour
- **MIZUNO**
  JPX923 Tour
- **MIZUNO**
  Mizuno Pro 223
- **PING**
  i230
- **PING**
  i59
- **SRIXON**
  ZX7 Mk II
- **TAYLORMADE**
  P•7MC
- **TAYLORMADE**
  P•770
- **TITLEIST**
  T100
- **TITLEIST**
  T100•S
- **EDEL**
  SMS Pro
- **WILSON**
  Staff Model CB

PLAYERS-DISTANCE IRONS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Apex 21
- **CALLAWAY**
  Paradym
- **COBRA**
  King Forged Tec
- **HONMA**
  TW757P
- **MIZUNO**
  JPX923 Forged
- **MIZUNO**
  JPX923 Hot Metal Pro
- **MIZUNO**
  Mizuno Pro 225
- **PING**
  i525
- **SRIXON**
  ZX5 Mk II
- **TAYLORMADE**
  P•790
- **TITLEIST**
  T200
- **MACGREGOR**
  MT-86 OS
- **SUB 70**
  699 Pro
- **WILSON**
  D9 Forged

GAME-IMPROVEMENT IRONS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Apex DCB
- **CALLAWAY**
  Paradym X
- **COBRA**
  Aerojet
- **MIZUNO**
  JPX923 Hot Metal
- **PING**
  G430
- **PXG**
  0211 XCOR2
- **SRIXON**
  ZX4 Mk II
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth
- **TITLEIST**
  T300
- **CLEVELAND**
  Launcher XL
- **COBRA**
  King Forged Tec-X
- **TOUR EDGE**
  Exotics E723
- **WILSON**
  Dynapwr

SUPER-GAME-IMPROVEMENT IRONS

- **CALLAWAY**
  Great Big Bertha
- **CLEVELAND**
  Launcher XL Halo
- **COBRA**
  Air-X
- **COBRA**
  T-Rail
- **MIZUNO**
  JPX923 Hot Metal HL
- **PXG**
  0211 Z
- **TAYLORMADE**
  Stealth HD
- **WILSON**
  Launch Pad

○ **NEXGEN**
NS210

○ **TOUR EDGE**
Hot Launch E523

○ **XXIO**
12

○ **YONEX**
EZone GT

WEDGES

● **CALLAWAY**
Jaws Raw/Full Toe

● **CLEVELAND**
CBX ZipCore/Full Face 2

● **CLEVELAND**
RTX6 ZipCore/Full Face

● **MIZUNO**
T22

● **PING**
Glide 4.0

● **TAYLORMADE**
Milled Grind 3

● **TITLEIST**
Vokey Design SM9

○ **BETTINARDI**
HLX 5.0

○ **COBRA**
Snakebite

○ **EDEL**
SMS

○ **PXG**
0311 3X

○ **TAYLORMADE**
Hi-Toe 3

○ **WILSON**
Staff Model

MALLET PUTTERS

● **BETTINARDI**
Queen B

● **BETTINARDI**
Studio Stock

● **CLEVELAND**
Frontline Elite

● **EVNROLL**
EV 5.1/5.2/5.3

● **EVNROLL**
EV12

● **ODYSSEY**
Tri-Hot 5K

● **ODYSSEY**
White Hot OG

● **PING**
New Ping

● **PXG**
Battle Ready

● **TAYLORMADE**
Spider GT Max

● **TITLEIST**
Scotty Cameron Phantom X

● **TITLEIST**
Scotty Cameron Super Select

○ **COBRA**
King Vintage

○ **ODYSSEY**
Eleven

○ **ODYSSEY**
White Hot Versa

○ **PING**
PLD Milled

○ **TAYLORMADE**
Spider GTX

BLADE PUTTERS

● **BETTINARDI**
BB Series

● **BETTINARDI**
Queen B

● **BETTINARDI**
Studio Stock

● **CLEVELAND**
HB Soft Milled

● **EVNROLL**
V Series

● **L.A.B. GOLF**
Link.1

● **ODYSSEY**
Tri-Hot 5K

● **ODYSSEY**
White Hot OG

● **PING**
New Ping

● **PING**
PLD Milled

● **PXG**
Battle Ready

● **SEEMORE**
PVD Classic

● **TITLEIST**
Scotty Cameron Super Select

○ **EDEL**
EAS

○ **MIZUNO**
M.Craft OMOI

○ **TAYLORMADE**
TP Hydro Blast

THE PROCESS

THE HOT LIST JUDGES ASSESS THIS YEAR'S EQUIPMENT BASED ON MONTHS OF RESEARCH, MEETINGS WITH OUR SCIENTISTS AND TWO WEEKS OF TESTING WITH PLAYERS LIKE YOU

▸ **The judges**, listed at right, cast the only votes in the Hot List, but they gather insight from two independent panels. The Scientists advise us on Innovation, and players like you evaluate Performance and Look/Sound/Feel. **Those criteria are not equally weighted, as indicated at right.** The product's final score is based on its weighted average in the three Hot List criteria. All scoring is based on a 100-point scale. All player testing and meetings were conducted at the Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club and Harrah's Ak-Chin in Maricopa, Ariz.

GolfDigest

PERFORMANCE

50%

Based on interviews with our player panelists on their evaluations of clubs within a category, the judges assess the utility of each product. In other words, this is a grade of what happens to the ball when a player hits it. Foresight Sports GCQuad and Rapsodo MLM launch monitors are used at every hitting station. Fitters work with players so that they are evaluating a proper club (model, shaft, etc.) for their swing tendencies. Clubs with adjustable features are set to optimal individual settings. In addition to rating clubs on a five-point scale, players are asked to rank their top five clubs in order in each club category. (Note: Low-handicap players do not evaluate Super-Game-Improvement Irons, and high-handicap players do not evaluate Players Irons.)

INNOVATION

30%

In consultation with our technical panel and based on interviews and our review of technical documents, this grade reflects how a particular technology advances the category in all aspects, how that technology is explained to the public and to our editors, and to what degree a company commits to fitting the vast majority of golfers with this entry.

LOOK• SOUND• FEEL

20%

Using input from the player panelists, our judges evaluate the relative excellence of the visual, auditory and tactile experience of using a particular club. The more the club resonates with our understanding of what a golf club should be, the higher the grade it receives. In short, this is a grade of what the player experiences when viewing, holding, swinging and hitting the club.

All judging is based on a 100-point scale for each criterion under each club category.

(Note: Starting this year, Demand is no longer one of the criteria used in the Hot List.)

GOLD

Products earned a score of **93** to **100**.

SILVER

Products earned a score of **88** to **92.99**.

97-100 ★★★★★ **88-96** ★★★★ **70-87** ★★★ **51-69** ★★ **≤50** ★

HOT LIST JUDGES

MIKE STACHURA
Senior Editor (Equipment)

E. MICHAEL JOHNSON
Equipment Editor

HOT LIST COORDINATOR

DARIA DELFINO

SCIENTISTS

MARTIN BROUILLETTE, PH.D.
Professor of Mechanical Engineering, University of Sherbrooke

TOM MASE, PH.D.
Professor of Mechanical Engineering (emeritus), Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo

JOHN MCPHEE, PH.D.
Professor, Systems Design Engineering, University of Waterloo

DICK RUGGE
Senior Technical Director (retired), USGA

GEORGE SPRINGER, PH.D.
Paul Piggott Professor of Engineering (emeritus), Stanford University

FITTERS

CHRIS MARCHINI
Director of Golf Experience, Golf Galaxy, Coraopolis, Pa.

DEAN JACOBS
District Master Fitter, Golf Galaxy, Phoenix

TEACHERS

MOLLY BRAID
Teaching Professional, Westmoor C.C.

JASON GUSS
Director of Golf Performance, Jason Guss Golf Academies

ERIKA LARKIN
Director of Instruction, The Stable at Creighton Farms

PLAYERS

GARY ABBOTT, 35
Waterloo, Ontario
Handicap: 15

THOMAS B. ALLEN, 58
Middletown, Ohio
Handicap: 6

HANK BARTOS, 60
Bend, Ore.
Handicap: 11

J.D. CUBAN

GO TEAM Our players and editors spent 2,432 person-hours testing clubs at Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club in Maricopa, Ariz.

ALEJANDRA BEDOYA, 24
Bogota, Colombia
Handicap: 5

RICKY BROWN, 44
Fort Worth
Handicap: +4

RYAN CONDON, 29
New York City
Handicap: 14

TOM DAVIS, 71
Maricopa, Ariz.
Handicap: 16

DAVE GOLDBERG, 55
North Potomac, Md.
Handicap: 18

SEAN HARPER, 51
Delaware, Ohio
Handicap: 8

PAUL IANNIELLO, 61
Scottsdale
Handicap: 5

RYAN KROLL, 47
Chanhassen, Minn.
Handicap: 8

STEVE LACHMAN, 65
Prescott Valley, Ariz.
Handicap: 8

PETER LEE, 55
San Diego
Handicap: 9

DAN LUPO, 30
New York City
Handicap: 14

JOSH MACERA, 26
Cranston, R.I.
Handicap: 1

WEI MAO, 52
Sacramento
Handicap: 15

LARRY MCCOY, 58
Wilton, Conn.
Handicap: 6

BOB MCRAE, 68
Maricopa, Ariz.
Handicap: 13

ANAND MUDALIAR, 40
Philadelphia
Handicap: 9

GENE PAEK, 47
Dublin, Calif.
Handicap: 6

MICHAEL PEÑA, 47
Los Angeles
Handicap: 4

SHANE POPHAM, 34
Crestview Hills, Ky.
Handicap: 15

ALEX REINHART, 38
Milwaukee
Handicap: 12

MATT SINGER, 50
Anchorage
Handicap: 12

BK SUHR, 39
Orlando
Handicap: 2

DANNY WOODHEAD, 38
Omaha
Handicap: +3

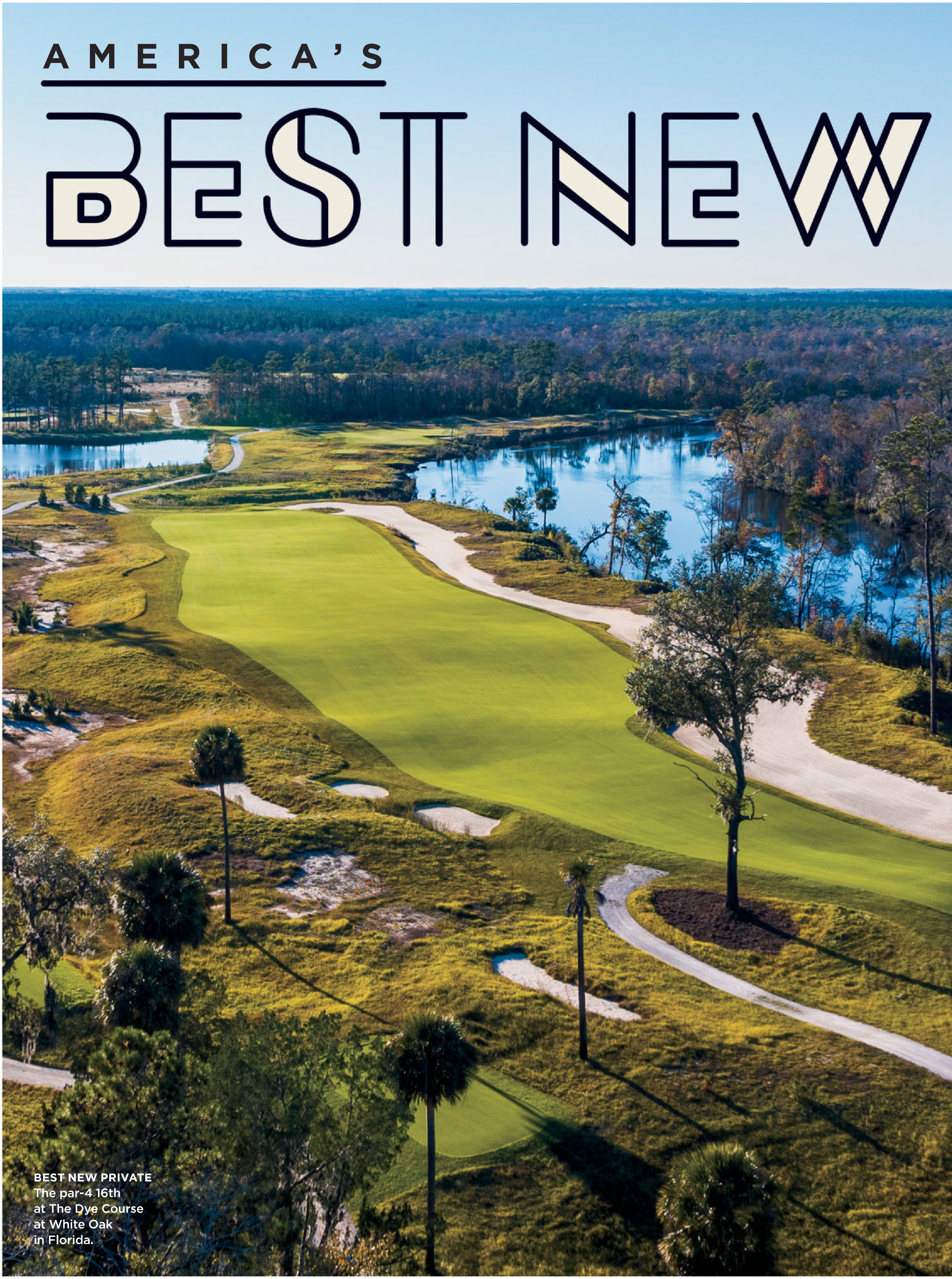
As the exclusive partner of the Golf Digest Hot List, we are the experts' choice to find the best clubs featuring the latest technology in golf. Let our Certified Fitters help you get the best fit for every club in your bag. Discover Hot List winners in-store or online at Golf Galaxy and DICK'S Sporting Goods.

MAX
PING
G430
Callaway
PARADYM
FORGED CARBON
JAILBREAK AI
Callaway
PARADYM
FORGED CARBON
FADE
DRAW
JAILBREAK AI

HOME OF THE
Golf Digest
HOT LIST
2023

AMERICA'S

BEST NEW

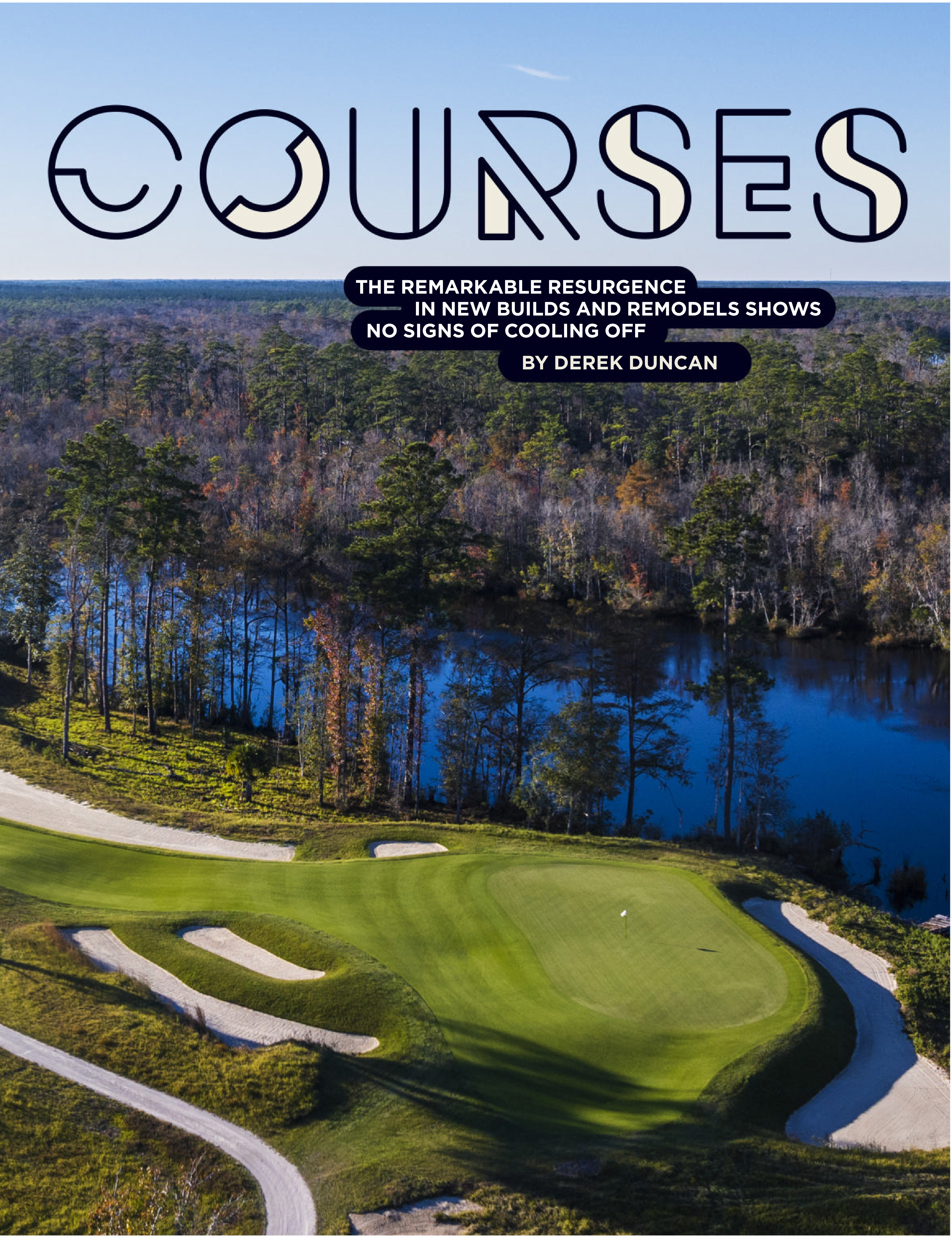


BEST NEW PRIVATE The par-4 16th at The Dye Course at White Oak in Florida.

COURSES

THE REMARKABLE RESURGENCE IN NEW BUILDS AND REMODELS SHOWS NO SIGNS OF COOLING OFF

BY DEREK DUNCAN



The rumbling you hear is the sound of excavators and bulldozers. Last year was the busiest for new course openings in more than a decade. Increased golf demand the past three years has spurred private clubs to initiate improvements and developers to embark on ambitious projects. Architects who can barely keep up are scheduling work two, three and four years out, and a backload of prominent developments are in various stages of construction and planning.

The southeastern states in particular—Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee—are thick with investment in new builds and remodels, as are California, Texas, Wisconsin, Utah, Minnesota, Nebraska, Washington, Montana and Idaho. The level will not match the manic splurge of the 1990s and early 2000s that oversaturated the golf market, but the quality and ambition of these projects are as high if not higher. It is a remarkable moment given how little new-course construction there was five years ago.

In 2022, Golf Digest panelists visited 21 Best New Course and Best Transformation nominees. The latter is an award for courses that have undergone an alteration beyond mere renovation, perhaps with an entirely new design or the introduction of new holes in which the course name remains the same, but the architectural reset makes the property almost unrecognizable. Candidates included municipal courses like Mallard Golf Club in Lake Charles, La., a sleek, ground-hugging new design that architect Jeff Blume built after the city swapped its existing course with an airport in exchange for unused land; the rebuilt Timpanogos Golf Club in Provo, Utah, where Kevin Atkinson created several new holes after a similar tradeoff with a neighboring medical facility; and Hendricks Field in Essex County, N.J., where Stephen Kay revamped an old Charles Banks course to give public players rejuvenated versions of holes like the Redan and Biarritz.

On the other end of the financial spectrum are courses of more maximalist scale like Union League National near New Jersey's southern shore. Dana Fry and Jason Straka took a worn course acquired by the Union League of Philadelphia (called Sand Barrens and built by Fry and then-partner Michael Hurdzan in 1997) and created 27 explosive holes that camber up and down a pair of 40-foot-high ridges that the architects constructed as a centerpiece feature much in the manner of Shadow Creek or Calusa Pines, two of the most engineered courses in design history.

Our panelists also judged 21 Best Renovation candidates that ranged from America's 100 Greatest and Second 100 Greatest fixtures like Eugene Country Club (retouched by Tim Jackson and David Kahn), Scioto Country Club and Wannamoisett Country Club (remodeled by Andrew Green) to improvements at lesser-known places like BraeBurn Country Club in Houston (renovated by Tripp Davis), Dornick Hills in Ardmore, Okla. (reworked by Tom Doak and Eric Iverson of Renaissance Design) and the Dick Wilson gem, Coldstream Country Club in Cincinnati (restored by Keith Foster).

Let's meet the winners.

MASTERWORK White Oak holes like the par-3 17th reflect the features Pete Dye used throughout his long career.

BEST NEW PRIVATE AND
BEST NEW WINNER OVERALL

The Dye Course at White Oak

YULEE, FLA., PETE DYE

In 2014, Pete Dye and Mark Walter met to discuss building a new course in the swampy backwoods of northeast Florida. As far as golf sites go, it had little going for it other than its location within the White Oak

PREVIOUS PAGES AND THIS PAGE: BRIAN OAR

Conservation, 17,000 acres that Walter's foundation had acquired the previous year. It wasn't anything Dye hadn't seen and whipped into a golf course before.

Walter is CEO of Guggenheim Partners, an asset-management firm, and leads the ownership groups that control the Los Angeles Dodgers and Chelsea F.C. of the Premier League. As a passionate conservationist whose family's foundation works to eliminate poaching and the habitat loss that affects vulnerable animals, his first obligation at White Oak was to the wildlife refuge, not golf. Established in the early 1980s, the refuge is home to 18 endangered species, including Asian elephants, black and white rhinoceros, cheetahs, panthers, tigers and cape buffalo. Golf is an amenity to help White Oak fundraise and increase conservation awareness.

Dye routed the course around wetlands that serve as habitats and vital egresses for animal populations. The course moves through the "between spaces" with the interior holes folded against each other and a second nine looping clockwise around the outside leading to the par-3 15th and the par-4 16th along the Saint Marys River separating Florida and Georgia.

Construction didn't begin until 2017. By that time, Dye, who was then 91, had walked the property twice but was no longer able to work (he died in early 2020). The job of finishing White Oak fell to contractor Allan MacCurrach of MacCurrach Golf, who had orchestrated 17 builds for Dye since the 1980s, including TPC Sawgrass, Harbour Town and The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island. Dye, who preferred to let design ideas develop in the field, didn't draw or use construction plans, so MacCurrach had to formalize the final-hole details based mostly on previous conversations. Despite his deteriorating health, Dye and wife Alice also made several site visits in 2017, during which MacCurrach received input.

"He could communicate clearly enough that a guy who had been with him for 40 years could figure it out," MacCurrach says. "But we also had Alice, and she was clear as a whistle. If Alice had a thought, a strong thought, it was going to be executed." (Alice was enamored enough of White Oak that she had her 90th birthday party there. She passed away in 2019.)

This unconventional process produced a design of unique purity, Pete Dye's strategies and shapes distilled to their essence. The goal was to return to a fundamental expression of Dye's architecture, a kind of "Dye classic" stripped of excess and closer to his 1980s and even 1970s forms. The foundational left-right and right-left shot shapes dictate tempo with par 4s and 5s snaking methodically over subtle, flowing grade changes, but gone are the clashing mounds and moguls. Long waste areas and flat bunkers trenched into the bases of the green pads are presented with little ostentation, allowing the wild grasses and patchy scrub between the holes to mesh the golf with the land. Greens are propped up as extensions of fairway and feature large, thematic movements rather than the rippling notes of Dye's later years when he surface-drained in five or six directions instead of just three. Greens like the fourth, fifth, ninth and 17th—a deep volcano-like par 3—move balls aggressively through troughs, tilts and swales. "The greens were a conversation that Pete and Alice and I had sitting around watching 'The Andy Griffith Show' in their den," MacCurrach says. "That was a conscious decision to go back to the macro contours so that there would be some kind of event on the first putt if you didn't knock it close to the pin."

White Oak's natural setting allows the holes to operate without distraction. Unfortunately, almost no one will get the chance to experience them. Most of the construction was complete in 2019, and the course has been left alone to fill in slowly. The only guests have been friends and potential donors invited by Mark Walter and select Golf Digest panelists. Our hope is that, with on-site lodging already available, stay-and-play packages will be offered in the future (proceeds could go to the Conservation). This is too important a piece of architectural heritage, the coda to the career of one of golf's greatest architects who seemed to be coming full circle in his thinking, to keep under wraps.

RUNNERS-UP:
(2) Union League National (Grant/Sherman), Cape May Courthouse, N.J., by Dana Fry and Jason Straka
(3) Quixote Club, Sumter, S.C., by Kris Spence and Jack Nicklaus II
(4) Driftwood (Texas) Golf & Ranch Club, by Tom Fazio
(5) Cutalong at Lake Anna, Mineral, Va., by Tom Clark and Ron Whitten

BILL HORNSTEIN

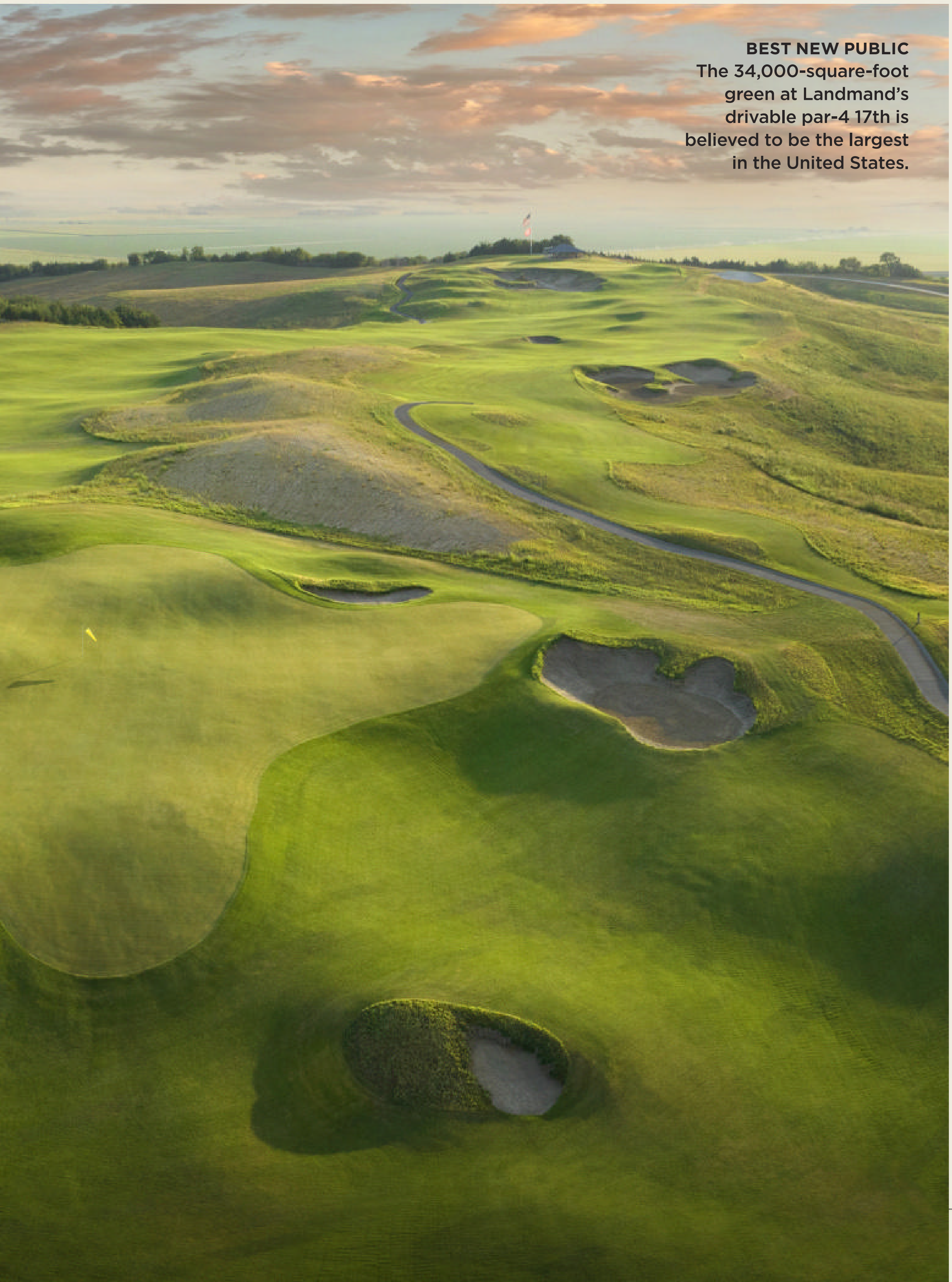
BEST NEW PUBLIC

Landmand Golf Club

HOMER, NEB., ROB COLLINS AND TAD KING

Landmand, a new design in northeastern Nebraska about 20 minutes from Sioux City, Iowa, sits on a vast, elevated section of loess formations with eroded furrows and valleys. It winds across the bluffs and between valleys, and from the tops of the ridges, horizon views of 20 miles or more are possible, filling the landscape with a feeling of unlimited proportion. Given the setting, it's impossible to discern the scale of the features in the near and middle distance, and the only way for architects Rob Collins and Tad King to make the golf look like it fit against the endless backdrops was to construct fairways 80 to 100 yards wide and greens that are, cumulatively and in some cases individually, the largest in the United States. Anything less wouldn't be right.

Landmand, which translates from Danish into "countryman" or "farmer," is the vision of Will Andersen, a fourth-generation farmer whose family has been sowing and harvesting this region for nearly 80 years. The family acquired the 588 acres Landmand sits on in 1976, but the terrain was too rugged to yield dependable agriculture, so it sat for decades waiting to be repurposed. The site has obvious assets—the drama, the views, the majesty—but it required significant work to pound it into something that would resemble sensible golf. More than a million cubic yards of earth were cut and shifted, and it's a remarkable accomplishment that King and Collins, known for creating the cult nine-hole Sweetens Cove outside Chattanooga (this is their first 18-hole design), were able to link everything together in a manner that makes walking it not just plausible but inviting.



BEST NEW PUBLIC
The 34,000-square-foot green at Landmand's drivable par-4 17th is believed to be the largest in the United States.

At this early stage, King and Collins' social-media following, as much as their architectural chops, has turned Landmand into an instant success. The club's allotment of 100 memberships sold out in "a couple of days," according to Andersen, as did the tee times for September, Landmand's first month open. "I didn't expect this," Andersen says. "Social media is pretty much all of our marketing, and Rob and Tad's following accounted for that. Almost everyone who came through said they loved playing Sweetens Cove."

It will be the architecture and joy of playing it that keeps Landmand aloft, especially the greens. Not only are they large but they possess slopes, sections, crowns and internal contours not seen this side of St. Andrews. The putting surfaces average 14,000 square feet (the size of the average American green is about 6,000 square feet), and the fifth, 15th and 17th are more than 25,000 square feet. Much of the creative credit goes to a visiting crew of shapers, an all-star team that included, at various points, people like Dave Axland, Jeff Bradley and Jim Craig, all longtime associates of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw; Trevor Dormer, who has worked with Coore and Gil Hanse; and Marc Burger and John Ellsworth. The human brain must be tricked into comprehending golf holes on a site this epic, so it makes sense that it required a large team of talented people to make it right.

RUNNERS-UP:

(2) Raindance National, Windsor, Colo., by Harrison Minchew and Fred Funk

(3) Park Mammoth Golf Club, Park City, Ky., by Colton Craig and Brian Ross

BRIAN OAR

BEST TRANSFORMATION

Entrada at Snow Canyon

ST. GEORGE, UTAH, DAVID MCLAY KIDD

For architect David McLay Kidd, the remodeling of Entrada was a test case. "Our peer group of architects are keen on going to work on a Donald Ross or Alister MacKenzie masterpiece, but the reality is that we have thousands more golf courses that were built post-World War II that are not fit for today's purpose," he says, meaning that the design features and functionality are outdated. "We were curious to see if we could take a '90s golf course that was built for virtually nothing and turn it into a something, so Entrada was an experiment."

Entrada at Snow Canyon, in the desert of southern Utah, was built in the mid-1990s by Johnny Miller's design company as an amenity to a housing development. The original outlay was just $2 million, and the course's architecture and slender fairways, with one nine diving through homesites and the second wandering out into an open plain of lava rock, put a premium on accuracy and aerial approaches to the small, elevated greens. The infrastructure had grown outdated, as had the level of difficulty for the members.

Kidd built a new course in the footprint of the old, essentially starting from scratch. The mandate was to make it more player friendly and to provide space to move the ball off the tee and around the greens. Fairway perimeters were pushed out, and the greens were lowered, enlarged and balanced with the surrounding elevations.

"We made the course much more strategic for high-handicappers and more recoverable," Kidd

BEST TRANSFORMATION The 15th, 16th and 17th holes at Entrada at Snow Canyon loop through a southern Utah field of lava rock that feels like it's from another world.

says. "All the approaches are set up for a slower-swing-speed player who can use contours to get into them, but it doesn't mean that a higher-swing-speed player still can't go pin-seeking with backspin." The entries into greens are molded to guide a running shot onto the putting surface if used thoughtfully, and the slopes in and around the putting surfaces will also funnel balls in different ways.

Kidd's work during the past decade at Gamble Sands in Washington and Mammoth Dunes at Sand Valley in Wisconsin emphasizes recoverability. He defines it as giving the player an abundance of room to play—sometimes 60 to 80 yards of width—yet presenting preferred lines and angles within that space. When players are out of position, they can still find their ball and get a club on it with a chance to stay in the hole. No holes at Entrada benefit more from this idea than 15, 16 and 17. They circle through a landscape of purple lava rock and were always highly picturesque, but slight offline hits would careen off the lava and disappear into the desert. Fairway expansion and the removal of sections of the rock now give players the ability to use the width of the holes and to get up and down around the greens.

For the relatively low cost of $7 million, the club received an entirely new course that's more playable and more thought provoking. Their membership initiation fees have increased more than 15-fold, and Entrada has gone from no waiting list to one that's no longer accepting applications. "We wanted to see if we could take a golf course that wasn't on anyone's radar and that the members didn't frankly like and turn it into something that might be on someone's radar and that the members would truly adore and love," Kidd says. The results are in—the experiment was a success.

RUNNERS-UP:

(2) Brookside Golf & Country Club, Columbus, Ohio, by Brian Silva

(3) Oakwood Country Club, Kansas City, Mo., by Todd Clark and Ron Whitten

(4) The Match at Jonathan's Landing, Jupiter, Fla., by Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner

GD+ GO TO GOLFDIGEST+ FOR SLIDESHOWS AND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT 2022'S CROP OF NEW COURSES.

HAMILTON GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

BEST RENOVATION

Hamilton Golf & Country Club (South/West Nines)

ANCASTER, ONTARIO, MARTIN EBERT

The great British architect Harry S. Colt, designer of famed layouts like the New Course at Sunningdale and Royal Portrush, made only three visits to the United States and Canada. In 1913, he spent time at Pine Valley, finalizing the routing for George Crump. During his 1914 trip he laid out the course for Hamilton Golf & Country Club near Toronto, developing what Martin Ebert, who renovated the club's three nines from 2019 to 2022, calls "a brilliant routing on challenging terrain." He

BEST RENOVATION The par-4 18th at Hamilton's South/West course.

also sketched out individual hole diagrams with notes. Plans to return were disrupted by World War I, and the course was assembled in his absence. Colt never made it back to Hamilton.

Ebert, who specializes in classical era U.K. renovations with design partner Tom Mackenzie, says that because Colt wasn't there to oversee construction, the details of his plans never materialized. After decades of nips and tucks by different architects, the only remaining element of Colt's original conception was the genius routing of holes that loop and cross each other on the sloping property.

"Hamilton felt like unfinished business as far as Harry Colt's great work was concerned," Ebert says. It presented an opportunity, he says, to finalize the design to a degree the old man might have better envisioned.

Most of Ebert's work involved expanding and reshaping greens (several were shifted off their existing spots), re-orienting bunkers to better relate to modern play (the club hosted the Canadian Open in 2019, won by Rory McIlroy, and will host it again in 2024), and shaping them in a manner more consistent with Colt's vision. "Obviously we don't know exactly what he would have wanted, but just from reading the comments on his plans there are things that stood out, like 'Tear out bunker faces,' " Ebert says. "He wanted that slightly rugged, rough-edged look."

Hamilton was built while Colt was away. Ebert understands what that is like. After doing preliminary work in late 2019, he returned to England. Then COVID intervened. Because he was unable to return to Canada for two years, construction oversight had to be done remotely. Blueprints instructed crews where to rough in bunkers, then Ebert would mark up photos of them with intricate sand lines and send them back. Cameras were also used to capture 3-D views of the bunkers, depths and green surrounds, placing the architect on-site virtually.

For the putting surfaces, Ebert had to rely on what little information Colt sketched and his knowledge of Colt's other work. The slopes and contours were programmed into detailed computer plans and sent to the crews, and Ebert could monitor the progress through data captured by survey drones. "Tom and I believe in giving the contractors and shapers precise plans, and that was such a godsend when it came to COVID," he said. "We've been doing this for so many years that we're confident that what we draw will work."

However inconvenient, the long-distance process at Hamilton worked. "It was the only way we could do it," Ebert says, noting there are advantages to it as well, including the prospect of saving time and client money by managing progress through new technologies. "These are techniques we will continue to use in the future."

RUNNERS-UP:

(2) Wannamoisett Country Club, Rumford, R.I., by Andrew Green
(3) Southern Pines Golf Club, Southern Pines, N.C., by Kyle Franz
(4) Scioto Country Club, Columbus, Ohio, by Andrew Green
(5) El Caballero Country Club, Tarzana, Calif., by Rees Jones.

GOLF GALAXY

HOME OF THE
Golf Digest
HOT LIST
2023

134 Clubs on the Hot List.

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Rory McIlroy
Dustin Johnson
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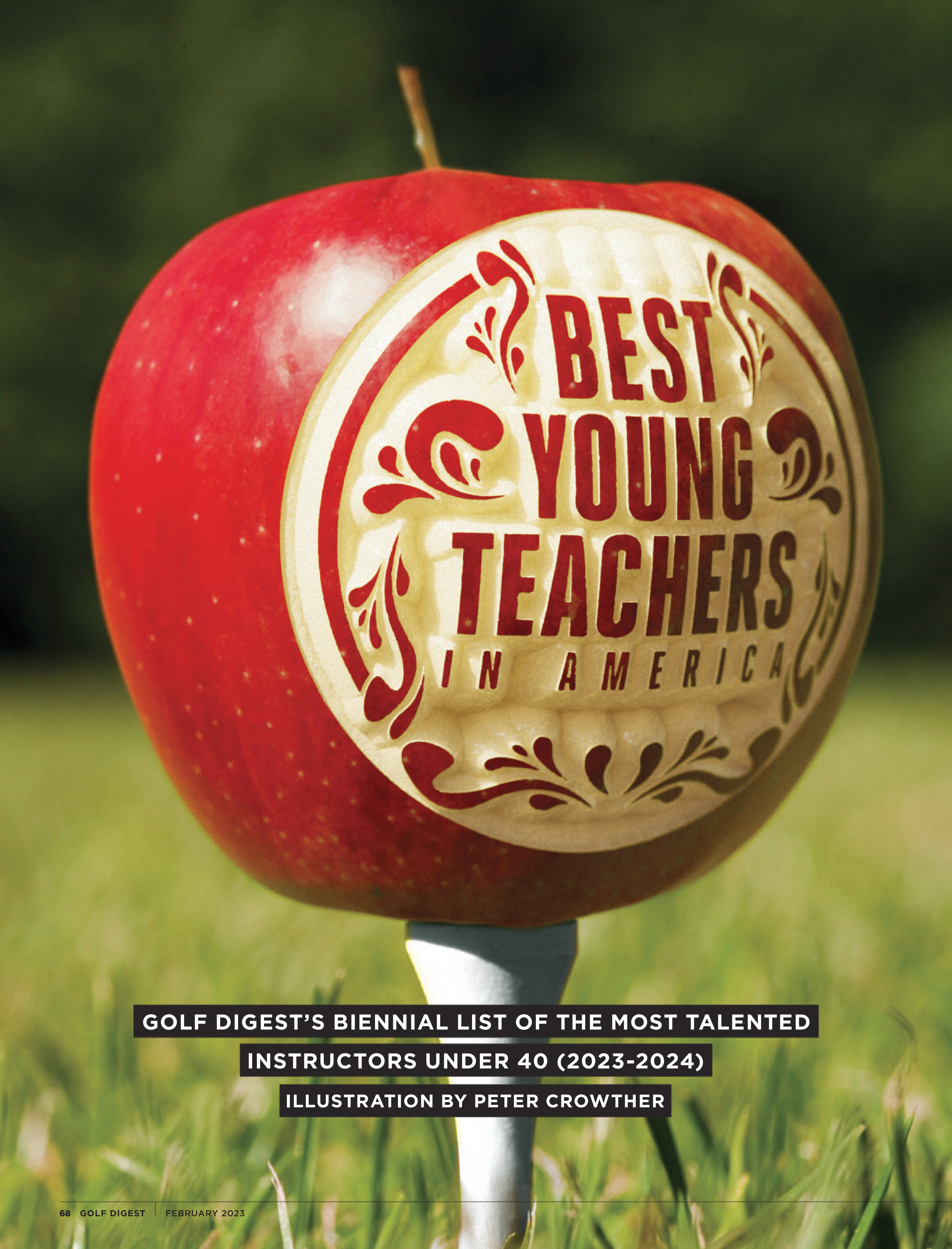
cobra
PUTT
by BioMech
Most Recent
Best Putts
99
Score
98
Score

Shots
Groups
TOTAL
Impact Location
CLUB SPEED
94.2
BALL SPEED
137.4
LAUNCH ANG.
13.3
CARRY
Driver, Premium, Feb 27


BEST
YOUNG
TEACHERS
IN AMERICA

GOLF DIGEST'S BIENNIAL LIST OF THE MOST TALENTED INSTRUCTORS UNDER 40 (2023-2024)

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER CROWTHER

WHAT DOES IT TAKE to be one of the Best Young Teachers in America? Golf knowledge? People skills? Influence on social media? Long hours on the range? Sure, those things help, but there's no one formula. The only exact commonalities of the instructors on this list are that they're all under 40, and they all have a real knack for making golfers better. ▸ In 2008, when our biennial list debuted, we identified 20 teachers in their 20s and 30s who were worthy of recognition. Our latest group of winners stands at 160, and their teaching locations stretch from Hawaii to New Hampshire. Some coach at exclusive places such as Baltusrol and L.A. Country Club. Others spend their days teaching indoors on simulators. ▸ Here we will reveal their names and give you a taste of their abilities as some of them share quality practice tips. These are Golf Digest's Best Young Teachers.

BEST YOUNG TEACHERS IN AMERICA 2023-2024

NORTHEAST

AARON ASEDO / 37
Knickerbocker C.C.,
Tenafly, N.J. $200/HR.

JASON BARRY / 35
Springdale G.C.,
Princeton, N.J. $150/HR.

NICK BOVA / 37
Hamilton Farm G.C.,
Gladstone, N.J. $240/HR.

DAVID BOVE / 36
Tashua Knolls G. Cse.,
Trumbull, Conn. $300/HR.

STEVEN CHALMERS / 38
Saucon Valley C.C.,
Bethlehem, Pa. $160/HR.

SCOTT CHISHOLM / 37
Rolling Green G.C.,
Springfield, Pa. $185/HR.

STEPHEN CLARK / 37
Clark Golf and Athletic Co.,
Southampton, N.Y. $250/HR.

JOANNA COE / 33
Merion G.C.,
Ardmore, Pa. $150/HR.

ERIC COGORNO / 34*
Bethlehem (Pa.) G.C.
$300/HR.

EARL COOPER / 33
Earl Cooper Golf,
New York City $250/HR.

ADDISON CRAIG / 32
The Bridge G.C.,
Bridgehampton, N.Y. $240/HR.

BRYAN DOUGHERTY / 36*
Hollywood G.C.,
Deal, N.J. $200/HR.

MIKE DOYLE / 36*
Five Iron Golf,
New York City $200/HR.

GREG DUCHARME / 31
Michael Breed Golf Academy,
Greenwich, Conn. $300/HR.

DARREN FALK / 39
Holly Ridge G.C.,
Sandwich, Mass. $130/HR.

JUSTIN FOSTER / 37
Ridgewood C.C.,
Danbury, Conn. $130/HR.

MARIO GUERRA / 38
Quaker Ridge G.C.,
Scarsdale, N.Y. $250/HR.

BRIAN GUSSIS / 38
GolfTec Woodbridge,
Metuchen, N.J. $250/HR.

RYAN HAGER / 29
Plainfield C.C.,
Edison, N.J. $225/HR.

JENNIFER HUDSON / 38
Sankaty Head G.C.,
Siasconset, Mass. $250/HR.

NICK IACONO / 34
Chester Valley G.C.,
Malvern, Pa. $175/HR.

MICHAEL LABELLA / 33
Nemacolin Resort,
Farmington, Pa. $200/HR.

CJ NAFUS / 32
Roxiticus G.C.,
Mendham, N.J. $160/HR.

NICK NOVAK / 37
The Golf Performance Center,
Ridgefield, Conn. $250/HR.

JORGE PARADA / 38
Liberty National G.C.,
Jersey City, N.J. $350/HR.

RICO RICIPUTI / 35
Coach Club,
North Hampton, N.H. $150/HR.

PAUL SELVAGGIO / 39
Westchester C.C.,
Rye, N.Y. $150/HR.

STEFANIE SHAW / 35
Sebonack G.C.,
Southampton, N.Y. $180/HR.

STEPHEN SIERACKI / 36
The Legacy C. at Woodcrest,
Cherry Hill, N.J. $200/HR.

TYLER SLOCUM / 30
Fresh Meadow C.C.,
Lake Success, N.Y. $200/HR.

MICHAEL SWEENEY / 36
The Bridge Golf
Learning Center,
New York City $300/HR.

DAVID TARASCHI / 34
Burlington C.C.,
Mount Holly, N.J. $200/HR.

JT THOMAS / 31*
Dollar Bill Divot Club,
New York City $200/HR.

MARK WALDER / 39
DiJulia Golf,
New Hope, Pa. $175/HR.

MATT WILSON / 37
Baltusrol G.C.,
Springfield, N.J. $220/HR.

MID-ATLANTIC

ANDREW BREWER / 29
Bayville G.C.,
Virginia Beach, Va. $125/HR.

GAYLON CUDE / 35
Golf House Tennessee,
Franklin, Tenn. $150/HR.

ROB FAILES / 28*
Birdwood G. Cse.
at Boar's Head Resort,
Charlottesville, Va. $90/HR.

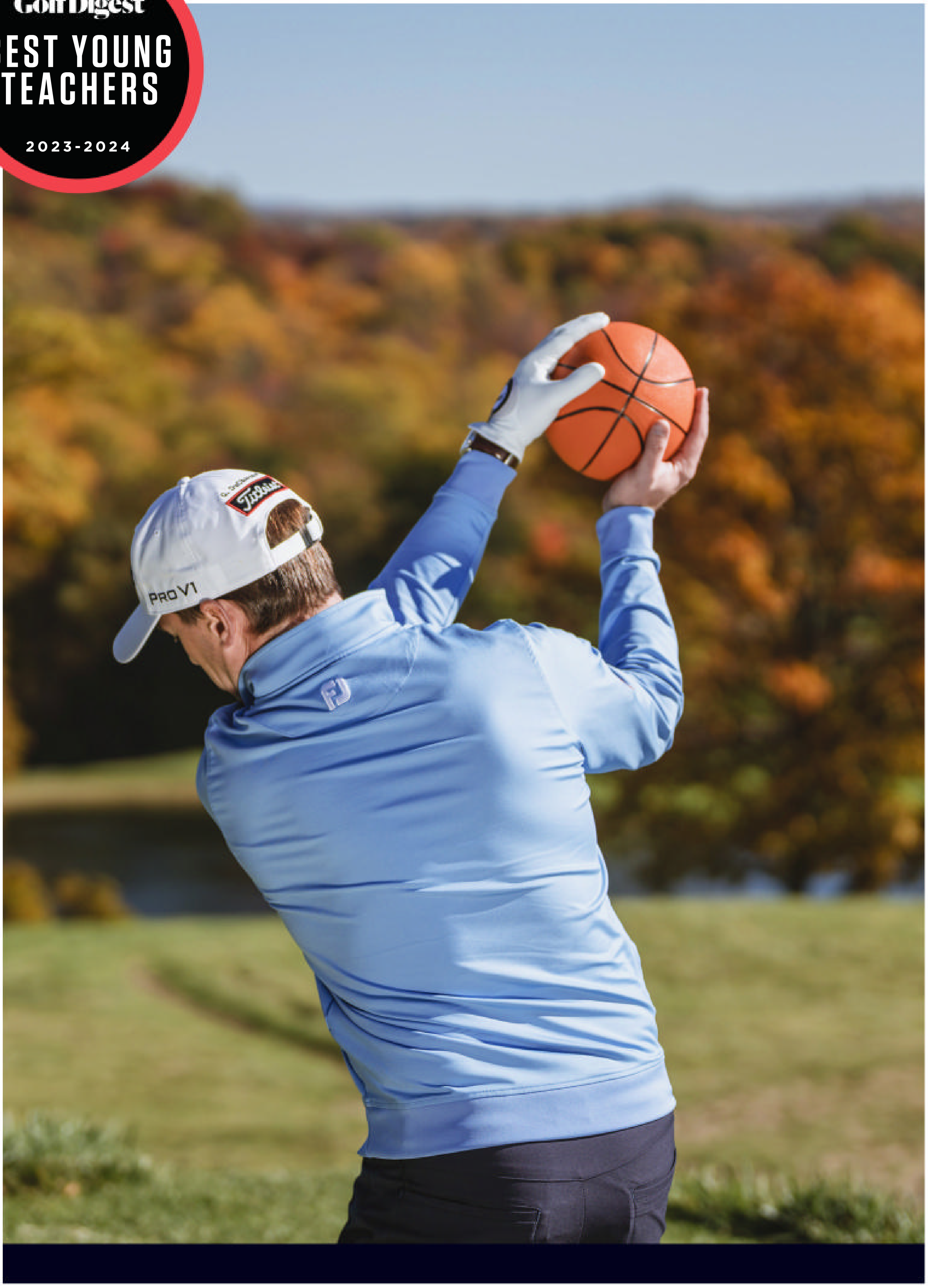
MATT KILLEN / 37
Troubadour G. & Field Club,
College Grove, Tenn. $1,000/HR.

CATHY KIM / 36
Baltimore C.C.,
Lutherville, Md. $190/HR.

MITCHELL MOORE / 35
Mitchell Moore Golf Academy,
Hopkinsville, Ky. $100/HR.

* = NEW THIS YEAR

Golf Digest
BEST YOUNG TEACHERS
2023-2024



Straighten your curveballs with your hands

BY GREG DUCHARME

● The same features built into hybrids to help average players get shots airborne and avoid slicing can induce hard hooks for better players. This drill can help you take the left side out of play. Take a medium-sized ball and hold it in front of you with your hands on either side. Having your hands separated will make it easier to feel where they are relative to each other. Now make a backswing and get your lead hand on top of the ball (*above*). Do the same in your swing and your lead arm will be higher and the face will be in a square or slightly open position. The more you exaggerate the lead hand on top, the more you'll promote a fade. If you're a slicer, set your trail hand at the top so your palm is facing away from you—like a free-throw shooter. That promotes a closed clubface.

GREG DUCHARME teaches at the Michael Breed Golf Academy in Greenwich, Conn.

DANIEL NEBEN / **34**
TPC Potomac (Md.)
at Avenel Farm $200/HR.

RUSHI OZA / **36**
Highland Creek G.C.,
Charlotte $90/HR.

GAVIN PARKER / **30**
Salisbury C.C.,
Midlothian, Va. $185/HR.

BEN PELLICANI / **38**
50/50 Golf Club,
Brentwood, Tenn. $175/HR.

BRIAN ROGISH / **38**
The G.C. at Lansdowne,
Leesburg, Va. $175/HR.

BILL SCHMEDES III / **37**
Mastery Golf Performance,
Hilton Head Island $250/HR.

RYAN SMITH / **38**
Marc Lapointe Golf Academy,
Fort Mill, S.C. $120/HR.

BLAKE THOMAS / **36***
Congressional C.C.,
Bethesda, Md. $150/HR.

COLBY WOLLITZ / **36**
Hurstbourne C.C.,
Louisville $250/HR.

TJ YEATON / **34**
Belle Meade C.C.,
Nashville $200/HR.

SOUTHEAST

DAVID ANGELOTTI / **33**
Sea Island G.C.,
St. Simons Island, Ga. $245/HR.

CHRISTOPHER ARDOLINA / **37**
Cove Cay G.C.,
Clearwater, Fla. $120/HR.

CHRIS BIGGINS / **30**
The C.C. of Birmingham (Ala.),
$80/HR.

MEGAN PADUA BUZZA / **37**
Bonita Bay C.,
Bonita Springs, Fla. $220/HR.

STEVE BUZZA / **36**
Bonita Bay C.,
Bonita Springs, Fla. $220/HR.

DAN CARRAHER / **38**
Dan Carraher Golf Academy,
St. Augustine, Fla. $200/HR.

CODY CARTER / **34**
Druid Hills G.C.,
Atlanta $165/HR.

PRESTON COMBS / **33**
Preston's Putting,
Kissimmee, Fla. $270/HR.

JOE COMPITELLO / **37**
Indian Creek (Fla.) C.C.
$200/HR.

RYAN CRAWLEY / **30***
Ryan Crawley Golf,
Lowell, Ark. $125/HR.

BRIAN CREGHAN / **35**
Pine Tree G.C.,
Boynton Beach, Fla. $250/HR.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL FULLERTON

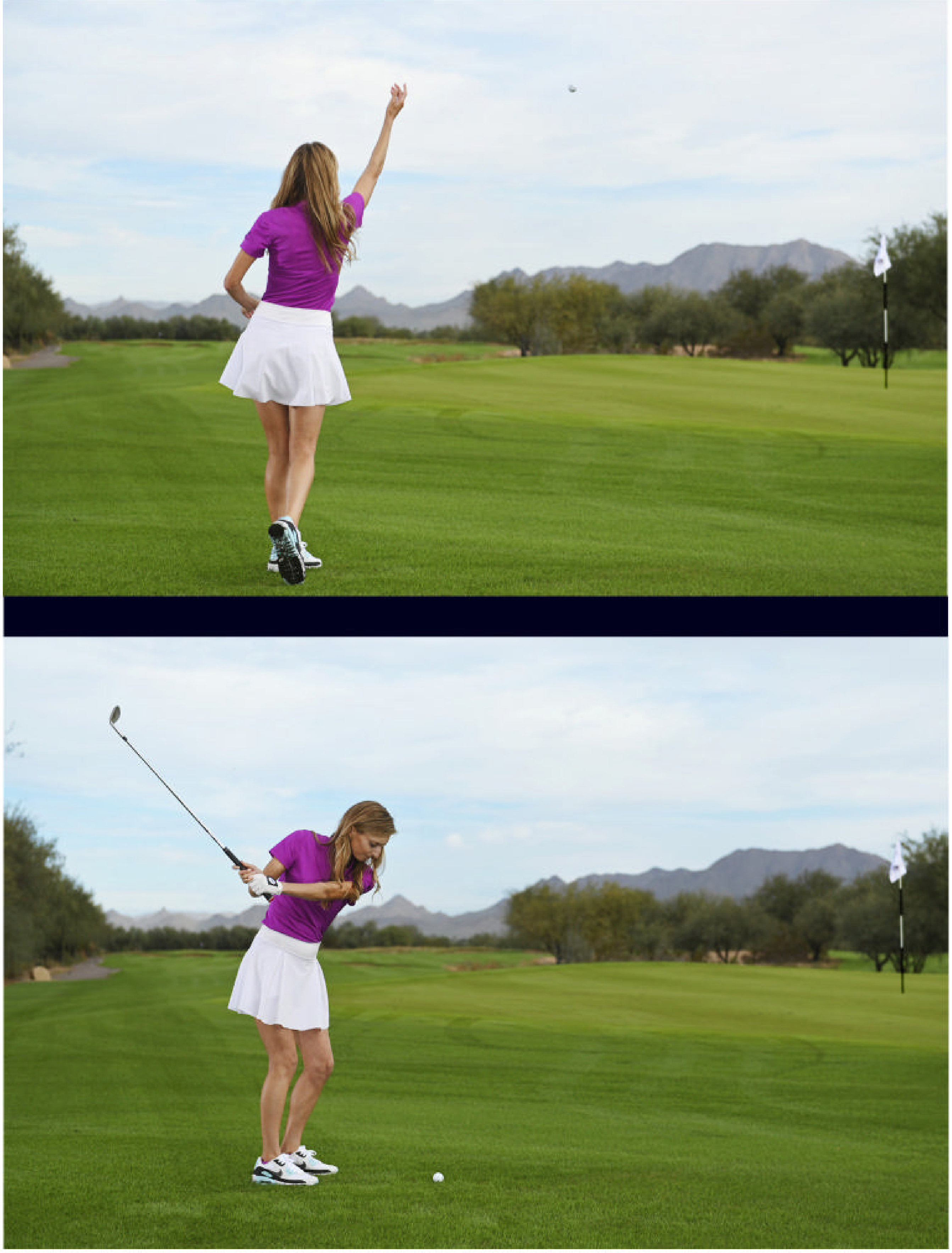
Hit your pitches like you're tossing a ball

BY LINDY LABAUVE

● Growing up, I played softball and a number of other sports, which I use to cross-train my students so they have a better understanding of the swing and feel required to hit certain shots. Take a soft pitch shot. Unlike a full swing, it requires more finesse than speed. I'll have students take a golf ball and toss it underhand at the flagstick (*below*). I ask them to picture the ball flight, where they want the ball to land, and how much it rolls out. I also have them note what their throwing hand is doing—it should be more quiet and not flip much, just like when hitting a pitch shot.

By practicing these tosses, I find that when it comes time to execute short shots, they're less concerned about technique and thinking about 15 other things, because the focus changes to what they want the ball to do. They're also able to better calibrate the length of their arm swing and the speed needed to hit the ball the right distance.

LINDY LABAUVE is the director of instruction at the Westin Kierland Golf Club in Scottsdale.



TAYLOR CROSBY / **39***
The Kingdom at Reynolds Lake Oconee, Greensboro, Ga. $200/HR.

KATIE DETLEFSEN DAHL / **34**
West Bay C.C.,
Estero, Fla. $160/HR.

STEVEN DEBOER / **33**
Steven DeBoer Golf Academy, Hanceville, Ala. $120/HR.

MATT DEJOHN / **32**
Matt DeJohn Golf Academy, Port St. Lucie, Fla. $300/HR.

JESSICA DICKSON / **39**
Palmira G.C.,
Bonita Springs, Fla. $120/HR.

SARA DICKSON / **35**
Wilderness C.C.,
Naples, Fla. $120/HR.

ALEX FERNANDEZ / **31**
Jim McLean Golf School at the Biltmore Miami, Coral Gables, Fla. $195/HR.

KATIE DIXON FINNEY / **39**
St. Andrews C.C.,
Boca Raton, Fla. $120/HR.

MORGAN HALE / **33***
Dewsweepers Downtown, Mobile, Ala. $125/HR.

JASON KUIPER / **37***
Grand Slam Golf Academy at Bobby Jones G. Cse., Atlanta $200/HR.

STEVE LIPPINCOTT / **38**
GolfTec Carrollwood, Tampa, Fla. $175/HR.

MATT MCLEAN / **38**
The Concession G.C., Bradenton, Fla. $200/HR.

BRETT MEYER / **37**
Golfzon Leadbetter Academy HQ Reunion (Fla.) $250/HR.

JOHN MONTGOMERY / **32**
Celebration (Fla.) Golf Academy $200/HR.

RENEE O'HIGGINS / **39**
Quail West G. & C.C., Naples, Fla. $170/HR.

JOE OSTROWSKI / **37**
The Concession G.C., Bradenton, Fla. $165/HR.

CARLA OVERHISER / **35**
John Webster Golf Academy at The Breakers, Palm Beach $275/HR.

JAKE PLECZKOWSKI / **36**
Naples (Fla.) National G.C. $150/HR.

OLIVER POLLAND / **30***
Jim McLean Golf School at the Biltmore Miami, Coral Gables, Fla. $300/HR.

JASON SEDAN / **37**
Old Marsh G.C.,
Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. $350/HR.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY J.D. CUBAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL FULLERTON

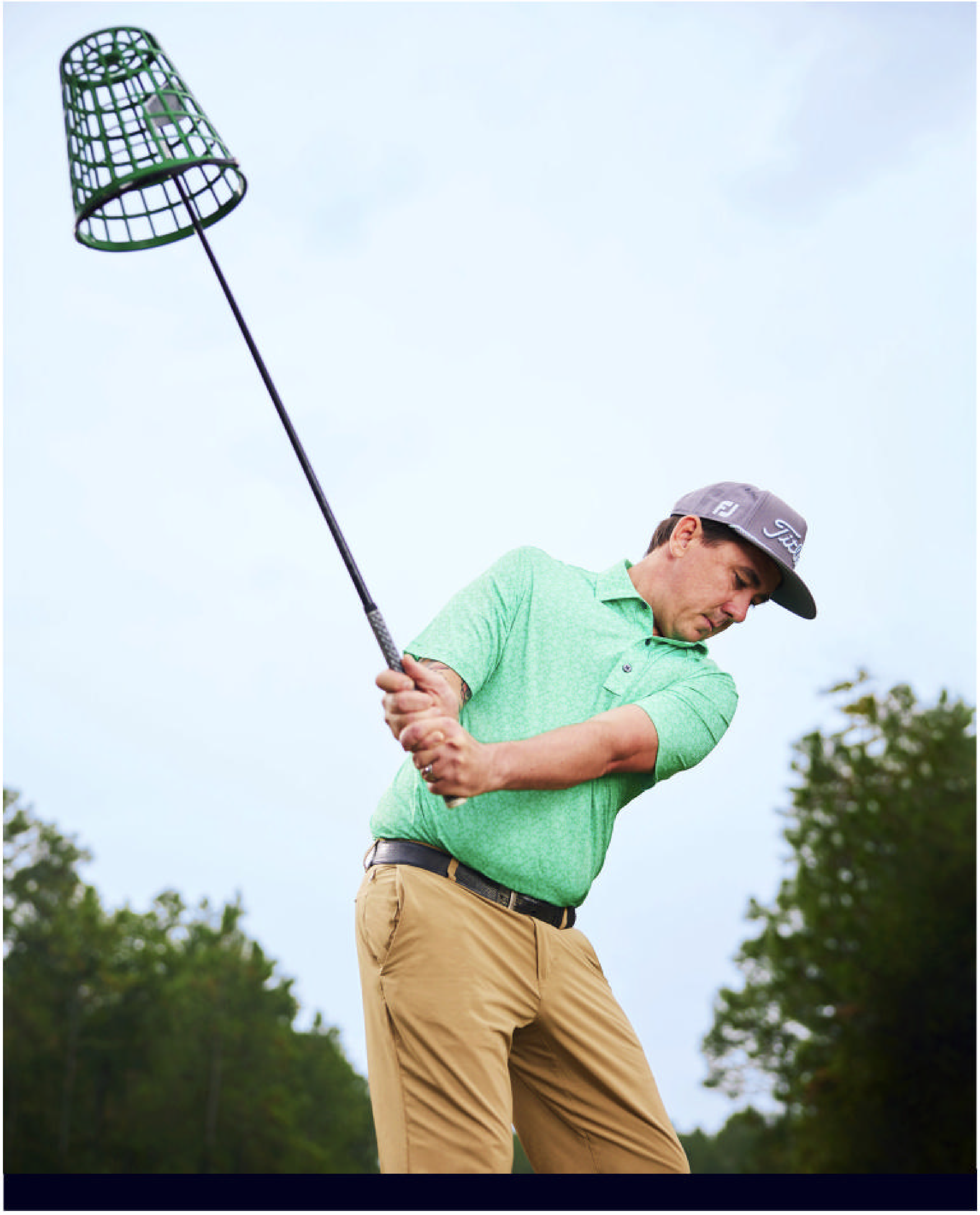
Learn to skim, not dig, in greenside bunkers

BY MATT WILSON

● As you probably know, the goal in a greenside bunker isn't to hit the ball; it's to swing through the sand under the ball. If you understand that concept, you're off to a good start in getting the ball on the green. But nearly as important is understanding how deep your club needs to travel through the sand under the ball. The answer? Not much. You want your wedge to skim the sand as you swing through impact. Any deeper than that—a common amateur issue—and you'll struggle to control the force of the shot and the distance the ball travels.

Here's a three-part drill to improve your sand shots. First, stick a tee in the sand so half of it is submerged. Then make swings trying to clip the tee. Next, place a ball on a tee that's submerged in the sand (*left*). Now try to clip the tee under the ball, which will pop the ball out like a bunker shot. The final step is to place a ball in the sand and imagine there still is a tee under it. Hit shots trying to clip that imaginary tee out from under the ball. This will give you a great feel for how to let your wedge glide—and not dig—through the sand. You can even take this swing thought to the course.

MATT WILSON is the director of instruction at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J.



Toss your slice in a bucket

BY DAN CARRAHER

My teaching philosophy is that whoever is doing the work is the one who's learning. Instead of prescribing drills that help steer my students into the correct positions, I choose ones that force them to work harder to get into the right spots. I use resistance to create awareness of what their bad tendencies are, so they're more incentivized to fix them. That's how the fastest learning is done.

For my slicer students who struggle with an overly flat, inside takeaway, I place an empty range bucket over the top of their clubhead. As they make practice backswings, the weight of the basket discourages them from pulling the clubhead to the inside. If they do that, they're going to dump the bucket. To keep it in place, you need to rotate your forearms less during the takeaway and keep the clubhead and bucket just in front of your hands on a more vertical plane (*above*).

If you normally whip the club inside, this drill will be difficult at first. Once you get it, the club should feel lighter and easier to swing when you go back to hitting shots. You will be in a better position to swing down from inside the target line and avoid a slice.

DAN CARRAHER runs the Dan Carraher Golf Academy in St. Augustine, Fla.

JUSTIN SHEEHAN / 37
Pelican G.C.,
Belleair, Fla. $200/HR.

NATHALIE SHEEHAN / 29*
Vinoy G.C.,
St. Petersburg, Fla. $150/HR.

ERICA STONER / 25*
Raleigh (N.C.) C.C.
$175/HR.

ALANA SWAIN / 34
PGA Tour Performance Center
at TPC Sawgrass,
Ponte Vedra Beach $225/HR.

DEREK SWOBODA / 34*
Ocean Reef C.,
Key Largo, Fla. $175/HR.

BRANDO TOMMASI / 39
Jim McLean Golf School
at Miami Beach (Fla.) G.C.
$250/HR.

GRAYSON ZACKER / 37
Jim McLean Golf School
at the Biltmore Miami,
Coral Gables, Fla. $300/HR.

MIDWEST

GREG BARESEL / 38
Cantigny G.,
Wheaton, Ill. $140/HR.

GARY BISSELL / 33
The Meadows G. Cse.,
Allendale, Mich. $120/HR.

TIM BOEGH / 38
GolfTec Madison (Wisc.)
$165/HR.

MOLLY BRAID / 35
Westmoor C.C.,
Brookfield, Wisc. $150/HR.

LUKE DONAH / 29
Cedar Rapids (Iowa) C.C.
$150/HR.

ADAM FARABAUGH / 36
C.C. of Detroit,
Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich.
$150/HR.

MAUREEN FARRELL / 35
Oakwood C.C.,
Kansas City, Mo. $200/HR.

MITCH FARRER / 31*
The Golf Room,
Dublin, Ohio $195/HR.

RICHARD FRANKLIN / 39
Deerpath G. Cse.,
Lake Forest, Ill. $175/HR.

CHRIS GREEN / 36
Glen View C.,
Golf, Ill. $195/HR.

COURTNEY MAHON / 39
Falcon Ridge G.C.,
Lenexa, Kan. $150/HR.

JOE MEGLEN / 38*
Stonewater G.C., Highland
Heights, Ohio $140/HR.

CHAD MIDDAUGH / 38
Muirfield Village G.C.,
Dublin, Ohio $100/HR.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENSEN LARSON

Cleveland GOLF
MAJOR SPIN

RTX^{6} ZIPCORE

Greenside spin. You can't win without it. That's why all these Major champions choose RTX 6 ZipCore Wedges. They're designed to maximize spin from the rough, sand, fairway or fringe, wet or dry. How? The new friction-enhancing HydraZip face, debris-channeling UltiZip grooves, and MOI-boosting ZipCore, that's how. Altogether, it's an unstoppable recipe for stopping power. Whether you're grinding for a Major Championship or that new personal best.

Take the fear out of shots over water

BY JOHN MONTGOMERY

I get it. When you have to carry a water hazard, it's hard to turn your brain off and not think about all of the previous times you drowned your golf ball. You might even resort to grabbing a "water-hole ball" as a precaution.

The reality is, those who revisit failures in their mind are doomed to repeat them. You need to change the script and send your brain a different message. The next time you're on the practice tee, imagine there's a water hazard between you and whatever target you choose (*below*). Stand directly behind your ball, and pick a target off in the distance. (If you're someone who likes to curve the ball, choose a starting point and a finishing point.) Now visualize the trajectory and shape of the shot over and over until it's perfectly clear. Once you address the ball, spend no more than five seconds over it before swinging away.

Work on this routine again and again with the goal of visualizing the desired outcome. Fairly soon the process of carrying a hazard will be easier than you could ever imagine, and you can chuck those water-hole balls for good!

JOHN MONTGOMERY teaches at the Celebration (Fla.) Golf Academy.

PATRICK MILKOVICH / 28*
Canterbury G.C.,
Beachwood, Ohio $140/HR

KYLE MORRIS / 37
The Golf Room,
Dublin, Ohio $400/HR

CLAYTON PENDERGRAFT / 28*
Cog Hill G. & C.C.,
Lemont, Ill. $90/HR.

EVA ROGERS / 34
Medinah (Ill.) C.C.
$155/HR.

JOE SHEREN / 36*
Smart Golf
& Fitness Instruction,
Chicago $200/HR.

TJ SULLIVAN / 38
GolfTec Oak Brook (Ill.)
$250/HR.

SAM VOSLER / 34*
Sanford Sports Golf Academy,
Sioux Falls, S.D.
$125/HR.

SOUTHWEST

JEREMY ANDERSON / 39
Legacy Golf
Performance Center,
Phoenix $300/HR.

JONATHAN BUCHANAN / 38
Dallas C.C.
$200/HR.

JOSEPH DICHIARA / 39
Ancala C.C.,
Scottsdale $200/HR.

NICK DUNN / 34
Altus Performance
at Old American G.C.,
The Colony, Texas $200/HR.

ADRIAN KELLEY / 34*
Slicgolf,
Mansfield, Texas $125/HR.

JUSTIN KLEMBALLA / 35
Forest Highlands G.C.,
Flagstaff, Ariz. $135/HR.

JOHN KOSTIS / 35
Grayhawk G.C.,
Scottsdale $195/HR.

MIKE KRAHE / 36*
Tour Striker Golf Academy
at Raven G.C.,
Phoenix $165/HR.

LINDY LABAUVE / 34
The Westin Kierland G.C.,
Scottsdale $150/HR.

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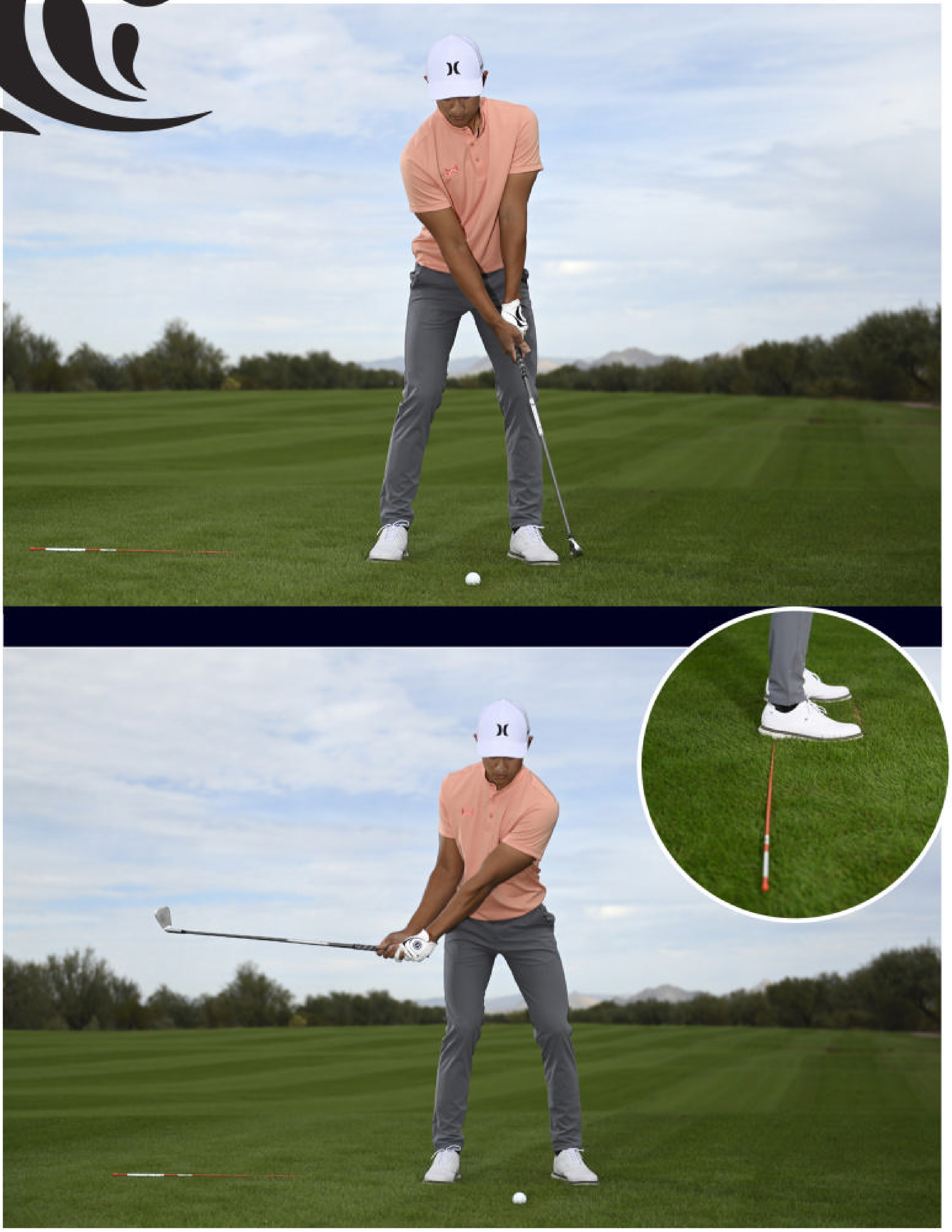

Pivot like a pro

BY JARUT PADUNG

While it's important for me as a teacher to guide you through the right positions, it's just as vital that you understand how to move your body to get in those spots. Without fluid dynamics, you'll get stuck or tend to get to the right positions too slowly.

I use the following drill with golfers who struggle with the proper sequencing of the swing. First, grab a club and address a ball with an alignment stick under your trail foot's heel (right heel for righties). Lift the clubhead over the ball and swing it forward about a foot toward your target (*top photo, above*). Now make a backswing while applying pressure on the stick with your trail foot. Finally, shift pressure back into your lead foot as you swing down and hit the ball.

Why start with the club in front of the ball? It adds some flow to your swing. You're more likely to make a fuller, deeper hip turn, and it makes it easier to shift into your lead foot in the downswing. When your swing is more fluid, you can increase your clubhead speed with a lot less effort.

JARUT PADUNG teaches at McCormick Ranch Golf Club in Scottsdale.

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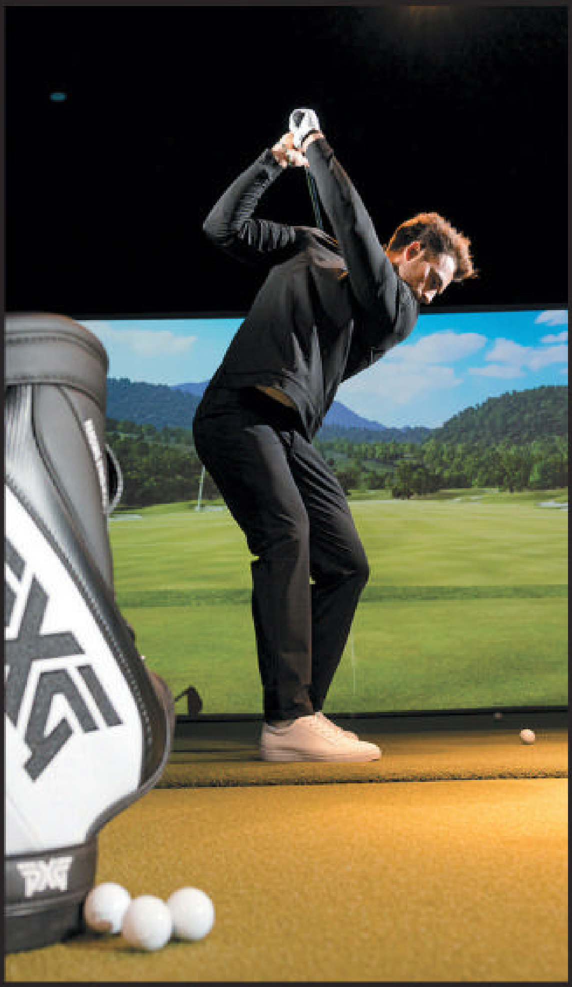

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Cash in on your putts

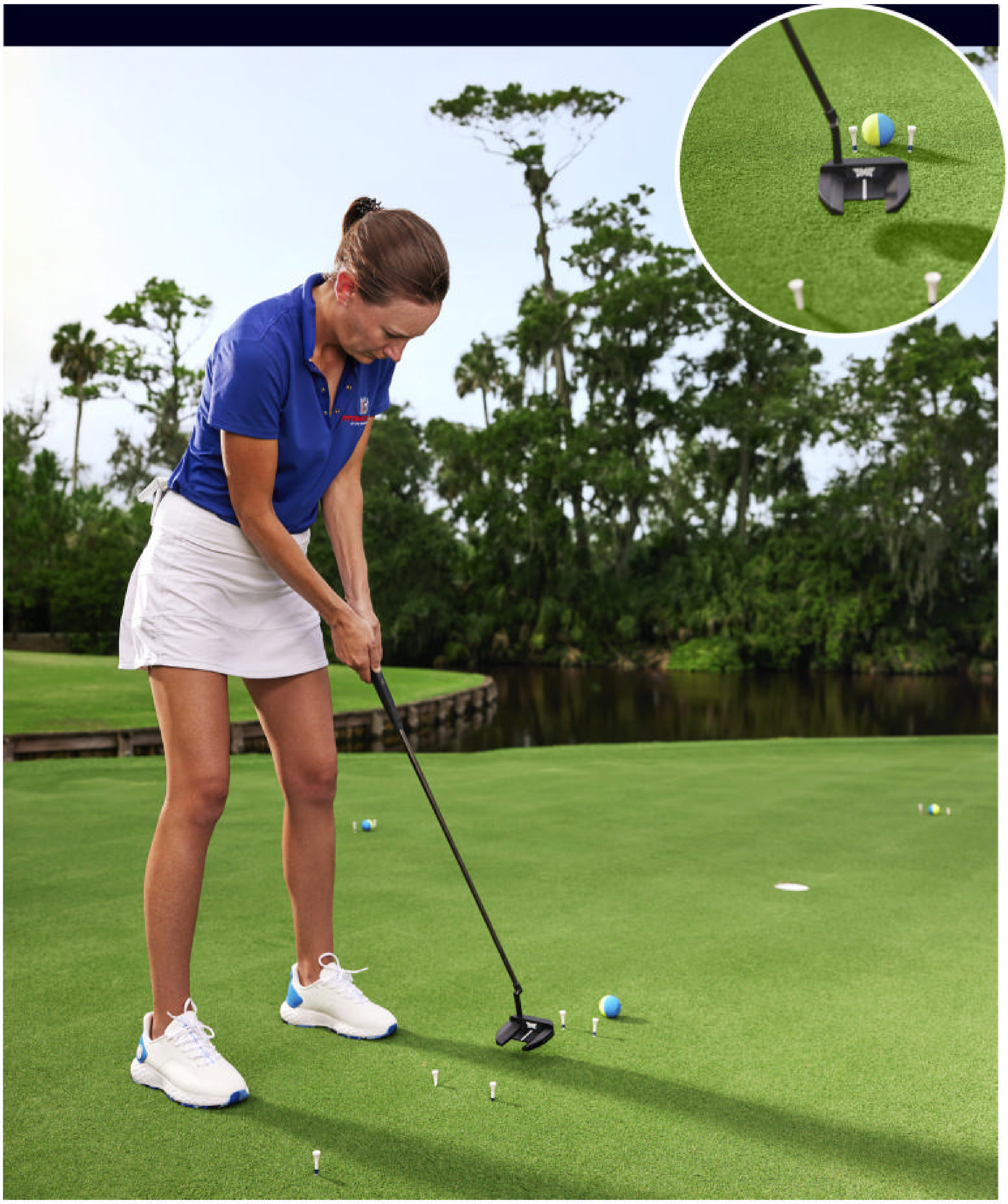
BY ALANA SWAIN

Feedback and consistency—those are my two buzzwords for practice. Without feedback, how are you going to know if you're doing something right? You can make a not-so-good swing on the range and still hit a good shot. For lasting improvement, you need to practice with feedback.

One putting exercise with tons of feedback is this drill using tees. Get yourself some two-toned balls or color one side on some white ones. Set up about six feet from a hole and stick two tees in the turf on either side of the ball, slightly wider than the width of your putter. Practice hitting the center of the face without hitting either tee, which produces an end-over-end roll with almost no sidespin or wobble. The two-toned ball will help you see this steady movement. Next, add a tee 12 inches behind the ball to help control the length of your backswing. Finally, form a narrow gate along your starting line and see if you can roll the ball pure through the gate (*below*). Move around the hole repeating the drill, so you can experience different breaks.

If you're able to get the ball rolling end over end without hitting the five tees, you'll build a reliable stroke that starts the ball on the line you choose.

ALANA SWAIN teaches at the PGA Tour Performance Center at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach.



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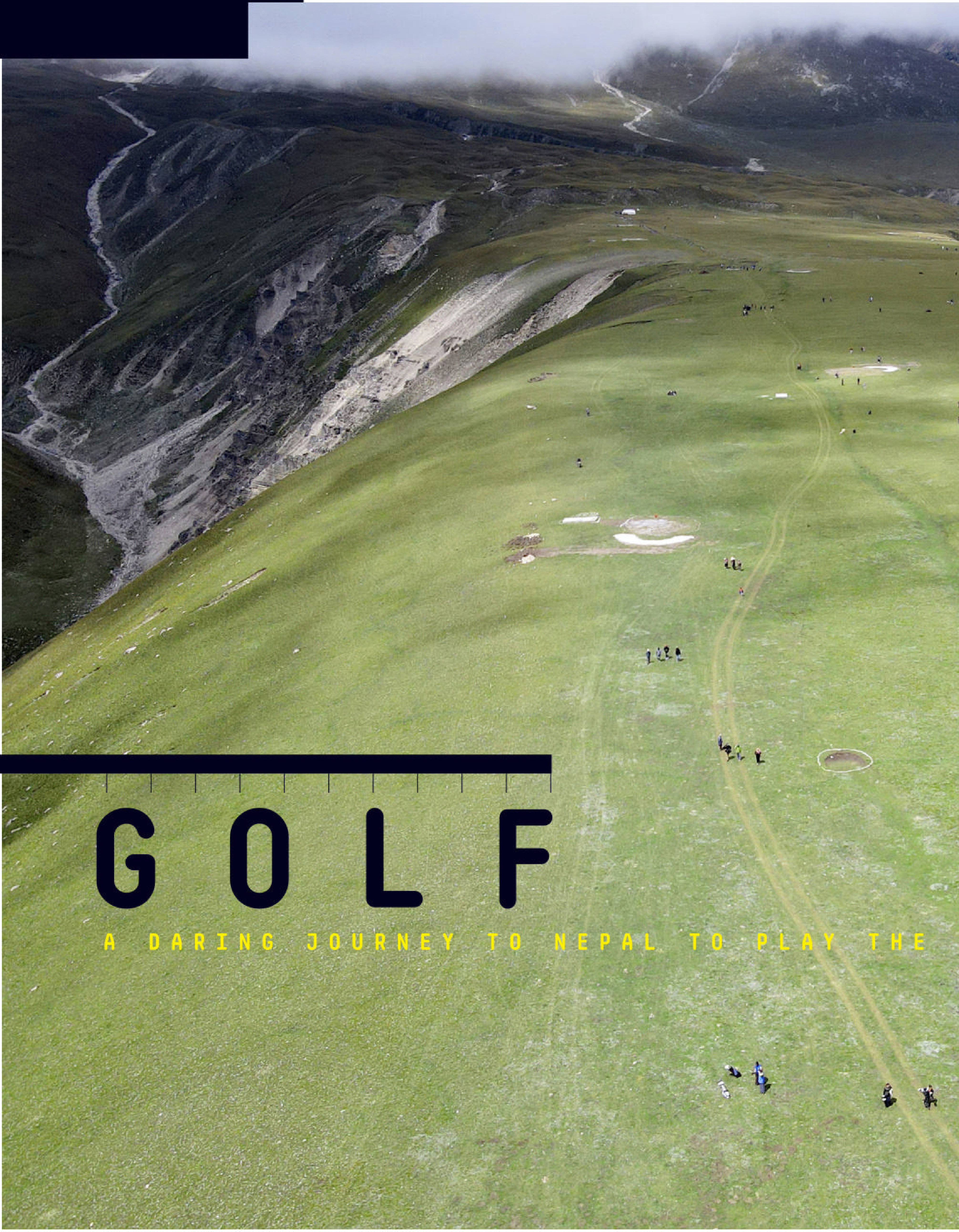
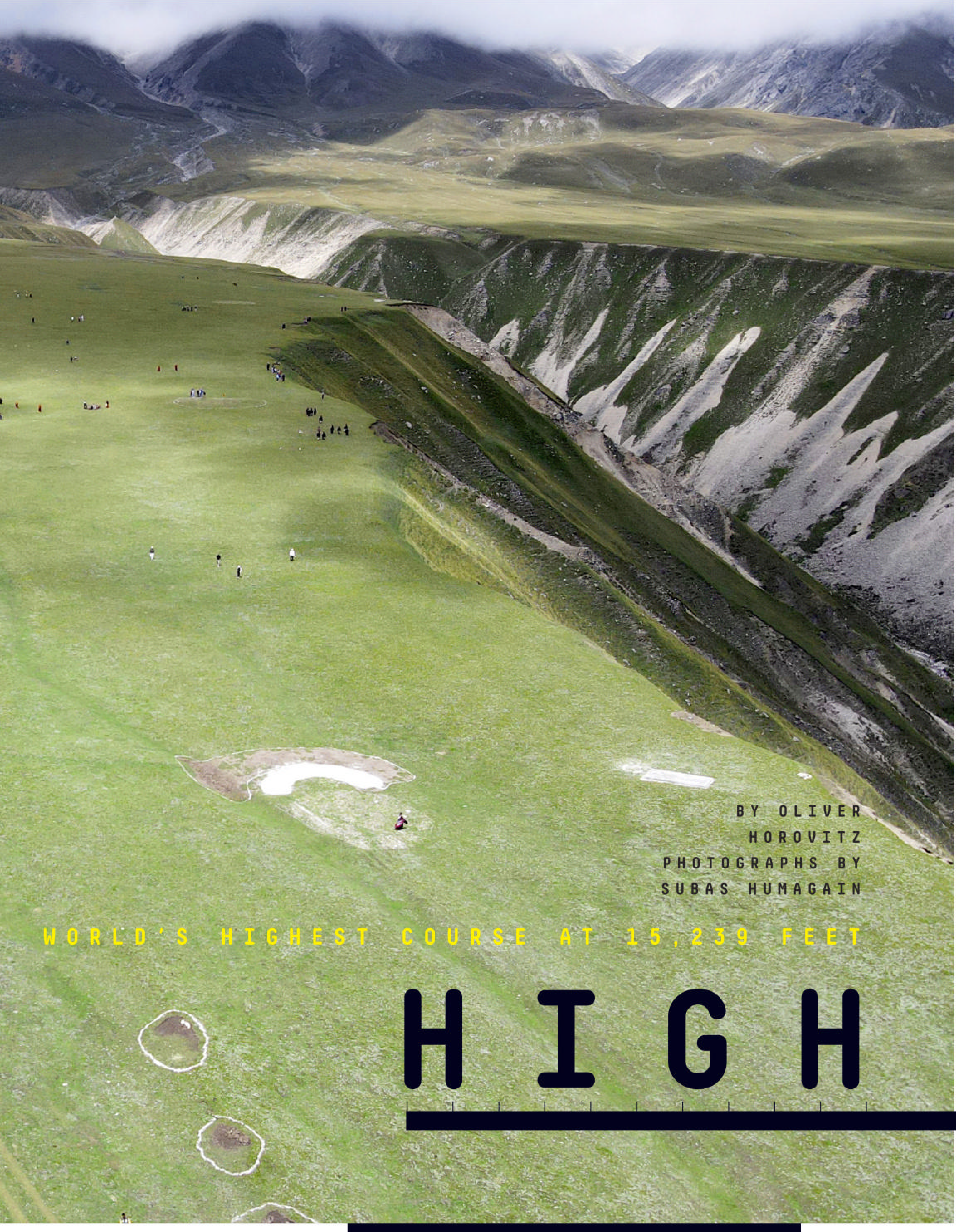


GOLF

A DARING JOURNEY TO NEPAL TO PLAY THE



WORLD'S HIGHEST COURSE AT 15,239 FEET

HIGH

BY OLIVER HOROVITZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUBAS HUMAGAIN

THE LANDSLIDE IS STILL HAPPENING.

As I watch from the back seat of our Jeep, a Nepali policeman in a bright-orange rainsuit and motorcycle helmet signals us to wait. He looks hundreds of feet above us, up into the rain, "reading the greens" of the upper slopes—checking for boulders. I hope he's a good boulder-reader because our lives are in his hands. He gives our driver a casual "go" signal, and our Jeep begins squelching forward through the mud-soup with a long train of Jeeps behind us.

"It's clear?" I nervously ask Deepak Acharya, who's sitting in the front passenger seat.

"He's saying yes," Acharya says calmly. Landslides are a way of life in Mustang, Nepal, during monsoon season.

"OK," I say, relieved.

Suddenly, the policeman and another helmeted man next to him furiously motion for us to stop. A golf-bag-size rock comes crashing down 20 feet in front of us. "Oh, my God," I breathe.

The hand signals now switch from "Stop" to "Go! Go! Go!" and we roar past the unstable area. The policeman smiles at me as we pass.

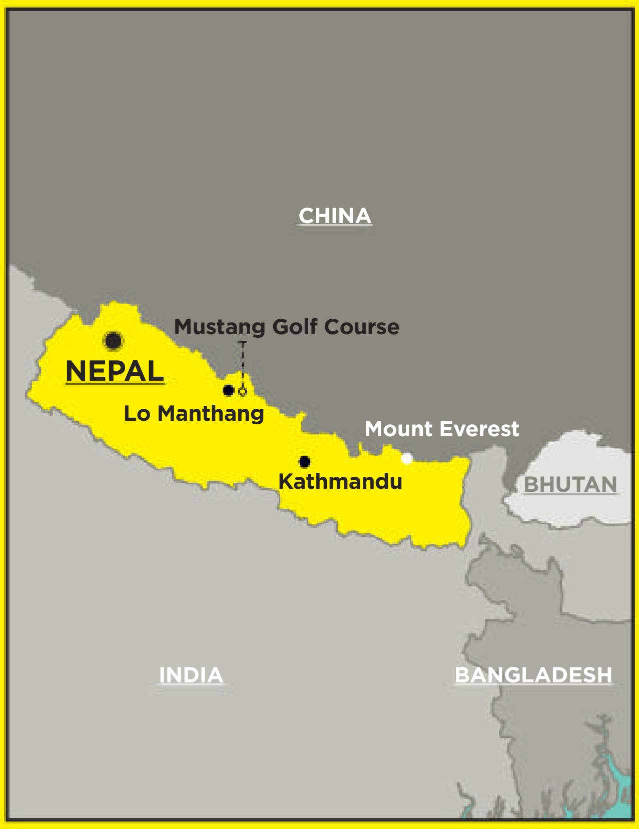
This is a lot for a golf tournament.

MAHENDRA MAINALI, MY GOLF BUDDY in Kathmandu, was the first to tell me about Mustang Golf Course, a new nine-holer in the remote Upper Mustang region of Nepal at 15,239 feet with an intoxicating claim to fame: When it opened on August 27, it became the world's highest golf course. For years, the highest had been in Sikkim, India, on an Indian Army base. The 18-hole Yak Golf Course at 13,025 feet came with a yak-size problem: Being a military course, it was effectively off limits to civilians. For years, I had been trying to get on. Golf in unexpected places has consumed me for the past decade. Meeting other golf obsessives in far-flung pockets of the planet, bonding over a shared love of graphite and Peter Oosterhuis, always makes me happy. I've played in the Mongolian National Open, in the Australian Outback on the world's longest course (Nullarbor Links, a five-day commitment with each hole about 50 miles from the next) and under the midnight sun in Iceland's Arctic Open. I've hit a golf ball from Everest Base Camp in Nepal and played in the world's highest golf tournament. But my leads for Yak Golf Course always went cold. Now Nepal—a country with eight of the world's 10 tallest mountains—had performed a high-altitude rescue. The world's highest golf course had moved from India to the land of Everest, and I had an invite to the launch.

ON AUGUST 19, I STOOD IN LINE AT JFK Airport in New York, backpack full of golf balls, for my 14-hour flight to Doha with continuing service to Kathmandu. I would be in Nepal in 22 hours, the lone American in the 36-player "Top of the World Golf Classic." Behind me was an elderly Nepali man in a wheelchair, a traditional yellow khata scarf (given by family and friends for good luck before journeys) draped around his neck. Down the check-in line, I spied yellow scarves tied to suitcase handles. This was my first adventure since the death of my father, playwright Israel Horovitz, to kidney cancer in November 2020. It had been a long time since golf was on my mind.

OF THE 31 MILLION PEOPLE IN NEPAL, only 1,200 are golfers. Of these, 70 are professionals on the Surya Nepal Golf Tour (eight events last season, with purses of about $4,000 to $11,000. Sukra Bahadur Rai, 24, last year's Order of Merit winner, is now a regular on the Professional Golf Tour of India). With

HIMALAYAN LIFE
Opening pages: An aerial view of Mustang Golf Course in Lo Manthang. This page: a precarious passage through Rupse Falls (above) en route to Pokhara; residents of the rural town of Lo Manthang (right).



the creation of Mustang Golf Course, Nepal now has seven courses, the oldest of which, the par-68, 5,410-yard Royal Nepal Golf Club, dates to 1917.

Mustang was the idea of politician Indra Dhara Bista, a charismatic member of parliament for Gandaki Province. Bista was visiting, of all places, Arizona, when he remembered a finger-like shelf of land high above Mustang's capital of Lo Manthang, seldom visited, used for grazing horses. In a flash familiar to any golfer who has looked at a field, hill or in-law's garden and mentally planted some Poa annua, Bista thought, *Wait, there could be a golf course here.* He used one million Nepali rupees (about $7,840) from the Constituency Infrastructure Development Fund to build Mustang.

The goal for Mustang Golf Course is for it to become a prime item on adventurous golfers' bucket lists. As Everest does for climbers, the course would bring visitors to Nepal's Mustang region and crucial aid to Nepal in its long comeback from the pandemic—two years of economic pain that saw a near halt in international tourism. I also sensed another reason behind Mustang's construction, one born of the grab-life-by-the-back-tees gusto I saw in so many of my Nepali friends. *Why not have the world's highest golf course in Nepal?* That spirit is why I was here. Sure, I wanted to see Mustang with my own eyes and feel what it is like to play nine holes above 15,000 feet. But after two unpleasant years of the pandemic, I needed a dose of my Nepali friends' zest for life.

Inside the chaotic domestic terminal of Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, awaiting a Yeti Air flight to the lakeside city of Pokhara, the launching pad for our golf expedition, golfers were assembling on a sticky monsoon season morning. "Ollie! How are you, my friend?"

Mainali, a lawyer and golf fanatic, gave me a big hug. Acharya, senior golf director at Gokarna Forest Resort and our tournament organizer, walked up with a grin and a competitors' sheet. Others joined, sipping "milk coffee" and wearing Titleist hats, dressed as if they were about to tee off in an hour, which, it turned out, we were. Once we landed in Pokhara (a 25-minute flight), everyone would head to Himalayan Golf Course, just outside town, for a practice round. That the group would be doing this before checking into hotel rooms was an urge I understood. Himalayan Golf Course, inside a 1,000-foot gorge, evoked the fantasy course in Golden Tee Golf, but first I had to pick up my trekking permits, acetazolamide (Diamox) and dexamethasone for the coming altitude—standard tournament preparations at this height.

In 48 hours we would go from Pokhara's 2,697 feet to Mustang's 15,239 feet. To combat AMS (Acute Mountain Sickness), I would take 125 milligrams of Diamox twice daily to reduce headaches and breathlessness, with pronounced side effects of finger tingling and constant peeing. I also had to take care of permits. Upper Mustang, closed to foreigners until 1992, requires a $500 restricted-area trekking permit for entry that grants 10 days of access. I also had to obtain an Annapurna Conservation Area Permit and a Trekker Information Management System card at Pokhara's Nepal Tourism Board office—why I'd packed a pile of CVS passport photos.

"Have you ever been to Mustang?" Shyam Tamang, one of the golfers, asked.

"First time."

The man's eyes widened. "Oh!" he said. "You're going to heaven."

THE UPPER MUSTANG REGION OF Nepal was once the ancient Kingdom of Lo, founded by King Ame Pal in 1380. The region is home to the Loba people, population 7,000. Lo Manthang, the walled capital city of Upper Mustang, above which the golf course was built, is 12 miles from the Tibetan border. Such proximity, combined with the region's history of few visitors, makes Upper Mustang one of the last strongholds of Tibetan culture in Nepal. Lo Manthang teahouses serve traditional Tibetan butter tea (reputed to prevent chapped lips). Residents practice Tibetan Buddhism of the Sakya lineage and wear traditional Tibetan cloaks called chubas. Seldom-seen snow leopards prowl the land.

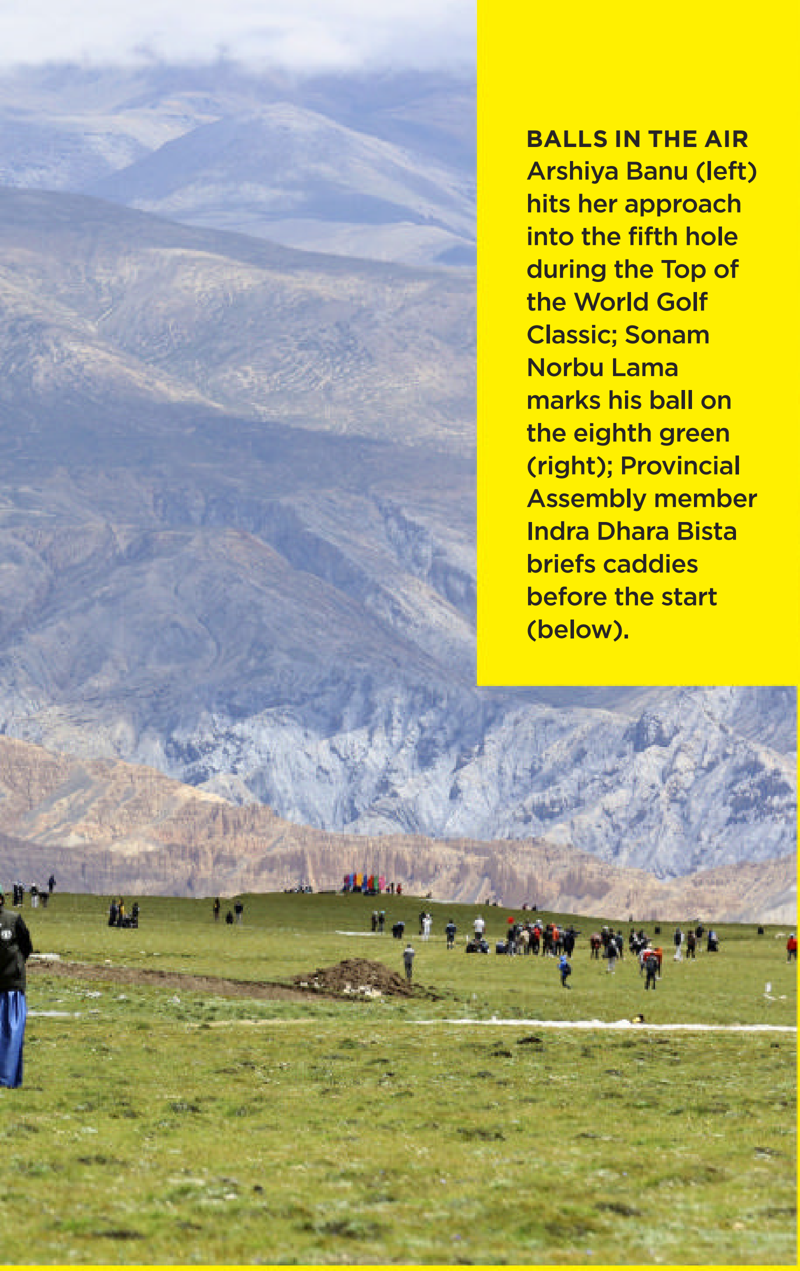
The Nepali golfers in my group were mostly in their 40s, 50s and 60s—business owners, retired police chiefs, high-ranking government employees, a few retired members of the military—and all obsessed golfers. "Many have been ringing these past few days, trying to get in [the tournament] last minute," Acharya told me. (As general secretary for Nepal's Professional Golfers Association, Acharya was our de facto trip captain.) "We're planning on holding the award ceremony at the course," Acharya said. "We'll see how everyone reacts to the altitude."

It was a muggy morning in Pokhara as we loaded into the Jeeps outside our hotel. Our 10 drivers, all Upper Mustang residents, most in their mid-20s with families waiting in Lo Manthang, wore matching white long-sleeve Mustang Golf Course shirts and green golf caps. Our drivers loaded the golf travel bags and tied them under tarps. Passing locals gave us quizzical looks. We were a traveling road show with ball-marker hat clips. Amid the hubbub, I spotted Dr. Rita Thapa, 81, a Royal Nepal Golf Club member and our tournament's honorary starter. Thapa, a former WHO director and pioneer in Nepal's public health, was making this trip despite altitude concerns from her family, including her husband, the former Nepali ambassador to the United States. "I'll be fine," Thapa assured me. "I just hope I hit it well."

Our driver—a stern-looking fellow with a ponytail and a denim jacket—whistled. We slammed Jeep doors closed and set off. Outside, the land was wet and thick around us, but shards of mountain peaks poked high above clouds and sparkled in the sky. Nepali folk music sang from our Jeep radio. We steadily overtook all cars and buses and motorbikes. I grew confident our driver had never been passed by another vehicle in his life.

There are easier ways to get to Lo Manthang than two days of driving in monsoon season. We could have taken helicopters ($125 per person for a four-person trip) or the 18-minute plane ride from Pokhara to Jomsom, halfway to Lo Manthang, skipping all the muddy road sections. We also could have played this tournament outside of monsoon season (June to August) when roads are perfect. But Jeeps were what we had chosen, August 27 was our tournament date, and nobody seemed concerned. The Nepali phrase *ke garne*—meaning "What is there to do?"—came to mind.

We passed the town of Kande, launching point for the famous Annapurna Base Camp trek (a popular alternative to the Everest Base Camp trek). Soon the blacktop road ended, and we bounced along a dirt road that didn't even exist 25 years ago. Now it runs from Pokhara to the Chinese border at Korala, bringing increased trade, tourism and the modern world to Mustang. Trekkers supposedly used a path near this road, although we saw none. Trekking in Nepal largely



BALLS IN THE AIR Arshiya Banu (left) hits her approach into the fifth hole during the Top of the World Golf Classic; Sonam Norbu Lama marks his ball on the eighth green (right); Provincial Assembly member Indra Dhara Bista briefs caddies before the start (below).

I NERVOUSLY TEED UP MY BALL ON OUR OPENING HOLE. MY DRIVE SPLIT THE FAIRWAY. I WAS ALREADY OUT OF BREATH.

hibernates until the clear, crisp days of October and November, with a second trekking window in April and May. (Nepali golfers, however, churn straight through the torrential rains of monsoon season—including one group of retired army majors with a weekly game at Royal Nepal called Monsoon Madness.)

In Mustang, the landscape changed, and the lush vegetation gave way to Utah-like desert and hills. The temperature dropped. We hugged the roaring Kali Gandaki River, its waters swollen from the rains, and rumbled through villages, passing schoolkids shouting "Namaste!" (Nepali for hello). We were driving through the Himalayas, crossing the iconic mountain range on our line for Lo Manthang.

As the sun set, we pulled into our home for the night, the Dragon Hotel in the former fortress town of Kagbeni (elevation: 9,199 feet). This was the entrance to the restricted area of Upper Mustang. Blue sheep, a major prey of snow leopards, grazed high on hills above us. Fields of buckwheat rustled in the wind. I already felt breathless from the altitude. Our group unloaded, stretched (I caught a few private practice swings and wrist-hinge checks among our group) and then headed to the dining hall for a Nepali meal of rice, meat and vegetables. I dined beside Deepak Magar, a 54-year-old golf pro at Royal Nepal, one of five professionals accompanying our group. Magar turned pro when he was 25, playing on and off the Professional Golf Tour of India. He had 10 wins, most of them in Nepal. Now he gives swing lessons. Many of his dedicated students were on this trip.

As second helpings were served, conversation at our table turned to golf. Someone mentioned playing at Royal Thimphu Golf Course in the nearby country of Bhutan. "Have you played golf in Bhutan?" I asked Magar.

The pro paused, lost in a memory. "In 1993," he replied softly, "I won the Bhutan Open."

SCENIC DRIVE Juni Rai tees off on the ninth hole (left). Of the 31 million people in Nepal, only 1,200 are golfers. Of these, 70 are professionals on the Surya Nepal Golf Tour (eight events last season with purses of about $4,000 to $11,000).

GD+ GOLFDIGEST+ HAS VIDEO FOOTAGE AND MORE PHOTOS OF OLIVER'S TREK THROUGH THE HIMALAYAS EN ROUTE TO MUSTANG GOLF COURSE.

THE COURSE IS PANCAKE FLAT, BUT SEVERAL HOLES HUG STEEP DROP-OFFS.

NEPALIS ARE PERHAPS BEST KNOWN for two professions. The high-altitude climbing Sherpa people, based in the Solukhumbu region of Nepal, established themselves as fearless and talented mountaineers and high-altitude porters, doing battle each season with fierce weather to put clients on distant peaks. (One Royal Nepal member, a 9-handicapper named Ang Norbu Sherpa, has summited Everest four times. A photograph of him holding the RNGC emblem atop Everest's summit hangs in the clubhouse.) Also globally revered are the Nepali Gurkha soldiers of the British Army, who still serve today. The name originates from the Nepali hill town of Gorkha, and they have served in the British Army for more than 200 years, including both World Wars, developing a reputation for stunning bravery. Decorated Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw once said, “If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Gurkha.”

Before driving to Lo Manthang the next morning, we had an important pre-tournament stop: The Muktinath Temple at the base of the Thorong La mountain pass at 12,171 feet is a sacred site for Hindus and Buddhists. *Mukti* means “release” in Nepali; Hindus from Nepal (and India) try to visit Muktinath at least once in their lives, seeking release from whatever burdens them. The excitement of our group approaching Muktinath rivaled that of a foursome playing Augusta National Golf Club for the first time. Everyone rushed up the hundreds of steps to the temple—no small task in the altitude. I hung back, carefully climbing alongside Thapa and Major Bejoy Moktan, 76, a high-ranking Gurkha officer with whom I'd played golf at Himalayan Golf Club in 2016. Thapa reached a giant prayer wheel and gazed out in wonder. “If heaven were on Earth, it would be here.”

The temple was thrumming with activity; 108 brass faucets lined the perimeter, releasing a stream of frigid holy water, under which visitors ran, splashed heads and filled bottles to bring back for family members. I walked through the temple grounds beside Thapa. Without warning, I started thinking of my dad, who had been my biggest supporter, golfing sidekick and best friend. I thought of how proud he would have been of me for being on this trip, and all the heartache I'd been holding in the past two years came pouring out. Thapa saw me crying, and I choked through an explanation. She patted me on the shoulder. “Light a candle in here for your dad,” she said tenderly, beckoning to a room filled with candles. “Think of happy memories of him.”

THE CITY OF LO MANTHANG, UPPER Mustang's capital, stretches out over a windswept valley at 12,598 feet. Its whitewashed walls hold a 600-year-old royal palace. As far back as the 1400s—while golf balls were being struck in St. Andrews, Scotland—Lo kings ruled from this perch. Today, 900 people call Lo Manthang home. This was our tournament base camp.

Inside the local community hall at our tournament welcome dinner, golfers passed around Tibetan biscuits called khapse. On the wood stage, beneath a string of prayer flags, 10 traditionally dressed women met my gaze. They were members of the Mothers Group local association hosting our dinner. The women sipped butter tea and smiled at us. By the door, 10 locals peered in excitedly. The show had arrived in town.

Politician Bista, wearing a cowboy hat and bright smile, made a jovial speech, welcoming all participants to Lo Manthang. Association members poured local Nepali wine into glasses

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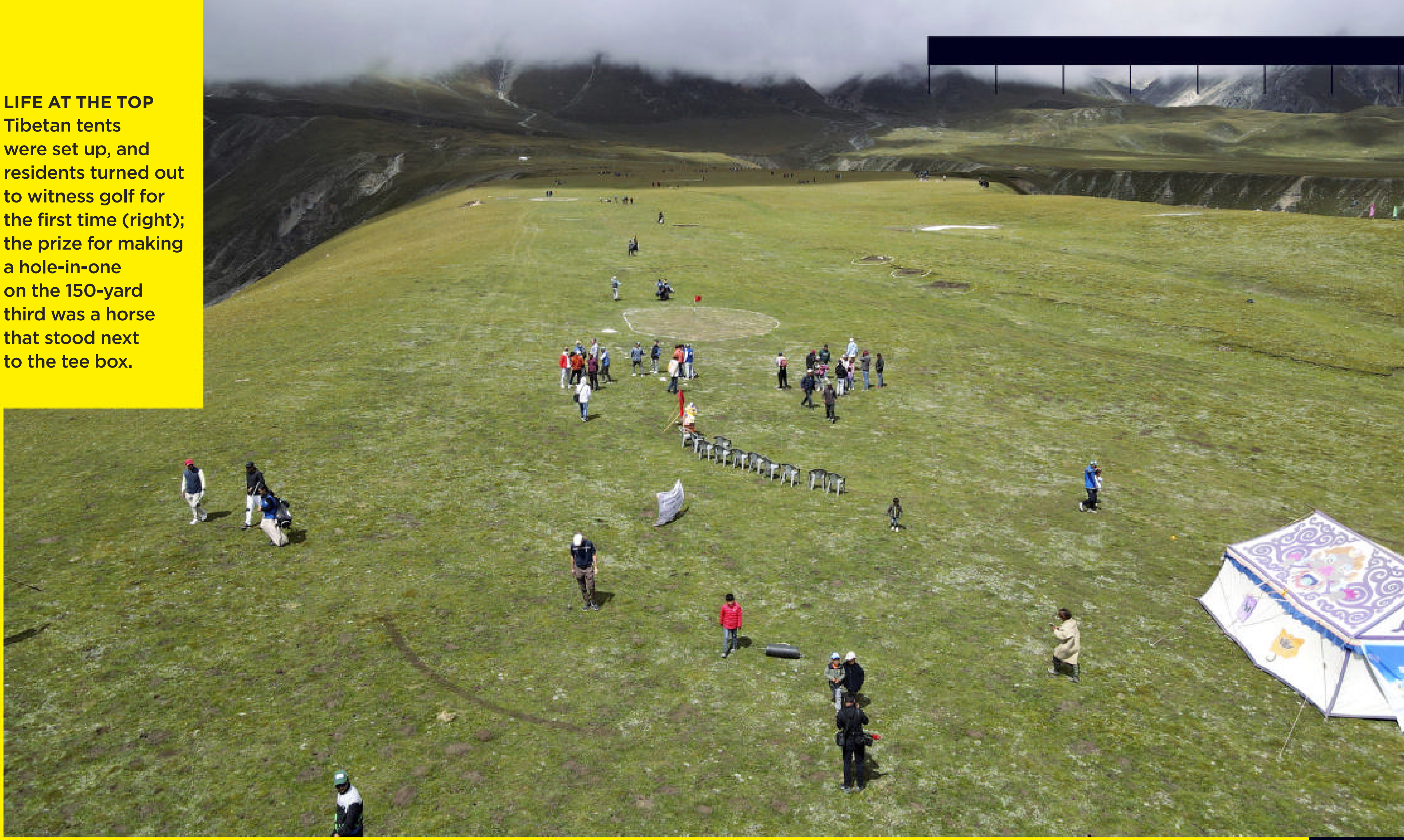

LIFE AT THE TOP Tibetan tents were set up, and residents turned out to witness golf for the first time (right); the prize for making a hole-in-one on the 150-yard third was a horse that stood next to the tee box.

and served from a buffet of *dal bhat* (a Nepali food staple). Worrying about tomorrow's altitude, I declined the wine. I wanted to be sharp.

At the front of the room, Acharya announced tomorrow's format: nine holes, shotgun start at 9 a.m. to beat fierce afternoon winds, Stableford scoring system (three-fourths handicap) with prizes for closest to the pin, low gross and longest drive.

Bhuwan Gurung, general manager of Pokhara's Himalayan Golf Course, was next to me in the buffet line. "How are you feeling, sir?" he asked.

"A little short of breath, but not bad," I replied.

"Good. Drink lots of hot tea for your strength." Gurung had been in Lo Manthang for three days, making the 30-minute drive to the course at 6 each morning. There, he spent hours top-dressing and hand-cutting Mustang's greens. During the past few months, he had spent 17 days up at Mustang. I asked what the locals thought. "Before, we had 15 Lo Manthang locals hitting shots for the first time at the course!" he smiled. "At first, they didn't know what we were making. I gave them training. We brought some balls. Some people hit nice shots, too!"

Our gaggle of golfers sat together, fingers tingling from Diamox, eating lentils. I sat next to Mainali. Across the room, a few of our drivers wore blue World's Highest Golf Course vests. Said Mainali, "Our drivers are all saying, 'You better let us hit shots up at the course!' "

"WHEN DO THE JEEPS LEAVE?" DEEPAK Magar asked. We were gathered on Lo Manthang's main drag. Throughout town, posters for Top of the World Golf Classic were pasted to walls. We took practice swings in DryJoys as cows wandered past us down the dirt road. If our scene didn't already evoke a Salvador Dali circus, the tent opened five minutes later. Thirty-six women in traditional Tibetan clothing (plus a few Yankees and Dodgers caps) jumped from carts.

THE WHOLE ROUND FELT LIKE A FESTIVAL. LOCALS ROAMED THE FAIRWAYS.

"They're from Lo Manthang," Acharya said. "They're caddieing for us today."

Soon we were in a Jeep heading to our golf El Dorado. We rumbled through grassland and up a series of steep switchbacks, clipping over the edge at 15,239 feet—finally at Mustang Golf Course.

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NATURAL STATE Course conditions were a bit rough—greens a mix of grass and sand—but improvements are planned for 2023.

Tibetan tents were set up everywhere. Local women in yak-wool hats offered pastries in a breakfast line, smiling brightly. Little kids bounced on their parents' laps. Everywhere there were golf bags, balls and golfers chipping into buckets. More locals arrived, scaling the 3,000-foot climb in the back of Jeeps, on motorbikes or on foot (a four-hour round-trip). Hundreds of locals were here to witness golf for the first time.

"OK, gather 'round everyone!" Acharya called in Nepali. Acharya's colleague, Pashupati Sharma, handed out scorecards. Female elders presented each golfer with a white khata scarf (inscribed with Mustang Golf Course logo) for good luck. I received my scarf, clasping my hands together in the traditional prayer sign. If I played badly, I would have no excuses.

As Nepali news crews with cameras crowded, Thapa struck the ceremonial opening drive down the middle to raucous cheers. My group started on the seventh tee. One of my playing partners was Sonam Lama, owner of the Himalayan Yak Restaurant in Jackson Heights, Queens. I nervously teed up on our 595-yard opening hole as my other playing partner, Shyam Tamang, wished me, "Best success." My ball split the fairway. Someone shouted "*Shotttttt!*" I was already out of breath.

A round at Mustang is like playing on the edge of the world. The course is pancake flat—more so than I'd expected—but five of the nine holes hug steep drop-offs. On the first hole, with all trouble left, I watched Ibraj Uddin uncork a vicious hook, then attempt a brief but exciting ball retrieval with his caddie before his playing partners forced him to abort. Course conditions were rough—the greens a mix of grass and sand—but improvements are set to resume in spring of 2023. The altitude made judging distances difficult. On some shots, the ball didn't appear to fly any farther. At the par-3 sixth, however, I hit a 9-iron 180 yards. Tee boxes are marked with stones. The views of majestic mountain ranges are spectacular.

My favorite hole was the third, a 150-yard par 3 that featured a hole-in-one competition. The prize? A horse. Remarkably, the horse stood beside the tee box, patiently waiting and wondering what was going on. It was a nice horse, but I worried it would make a tough prize to get through TSA. This became irrelevant when I overshot the green by 40 yards. I blamed the altitude. The whole round felt like a festival. The locals, including five Buddhist lamas in orange robes, roamed the fairways, causing constant shouts of "Ball!" which is Nepali for "Fore!" Others zoomed up and down the course on motorbikes. My caddie, Toshi, a teenage student, was all-world nice. Before each of my shots, she whispered, "Best of luck."

THE VIEWS OF MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN RANGES ARE SPECTACULAR.

Tamang won the Stableford trophy, which made sense, because he somehow putted like Ben Crenshaw on the bumpy greens. As a crowd formed for the awards presentation, local dignitaries sat beside gold-plated trophies of horses and snow leopards. One by one, the Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Rinjing, a high-ranking chief lama, distributed World's Highest Golf Course certificates. Rinjing announced me as the first American to play the course. (My 46 for nine holes was not announced.) We also learned that nobody won the horse.

A women's group from Lo Manthang began a joyous dance performance. I thought once again of this marvelous Nepali spirit, of Gurkha fighters inspiring British soldiers with their courage, of Sherpas climbing high on Everest, putting their lives on the line to put food on the table. This same spirit had made Nepalis say, "Why not have the world's highest golf course in this country? Why not come from Kathmandu in the middle of monsoon season to play the opening tournament?" All around me, a new chapter in the game of golf was being written.

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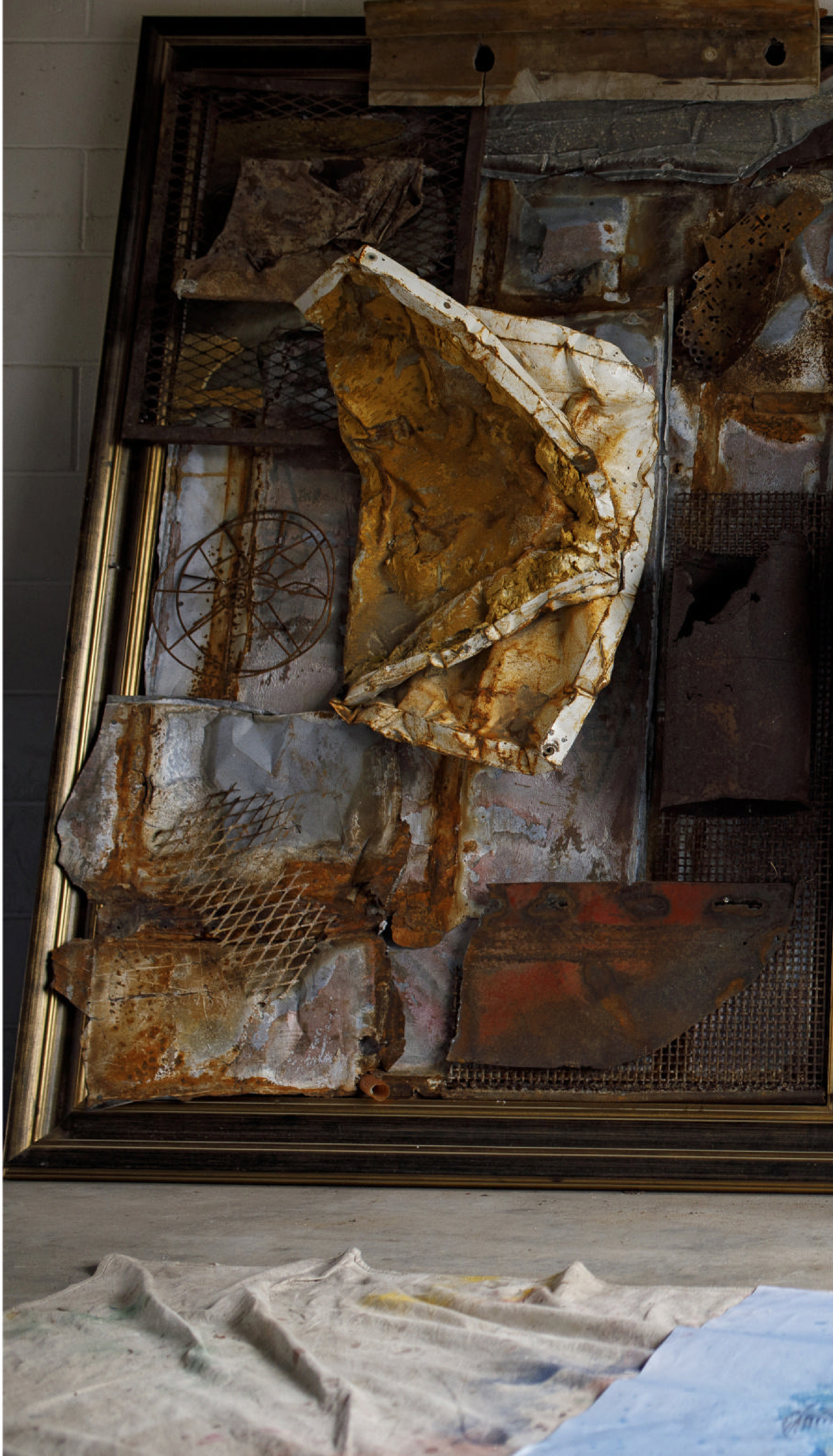
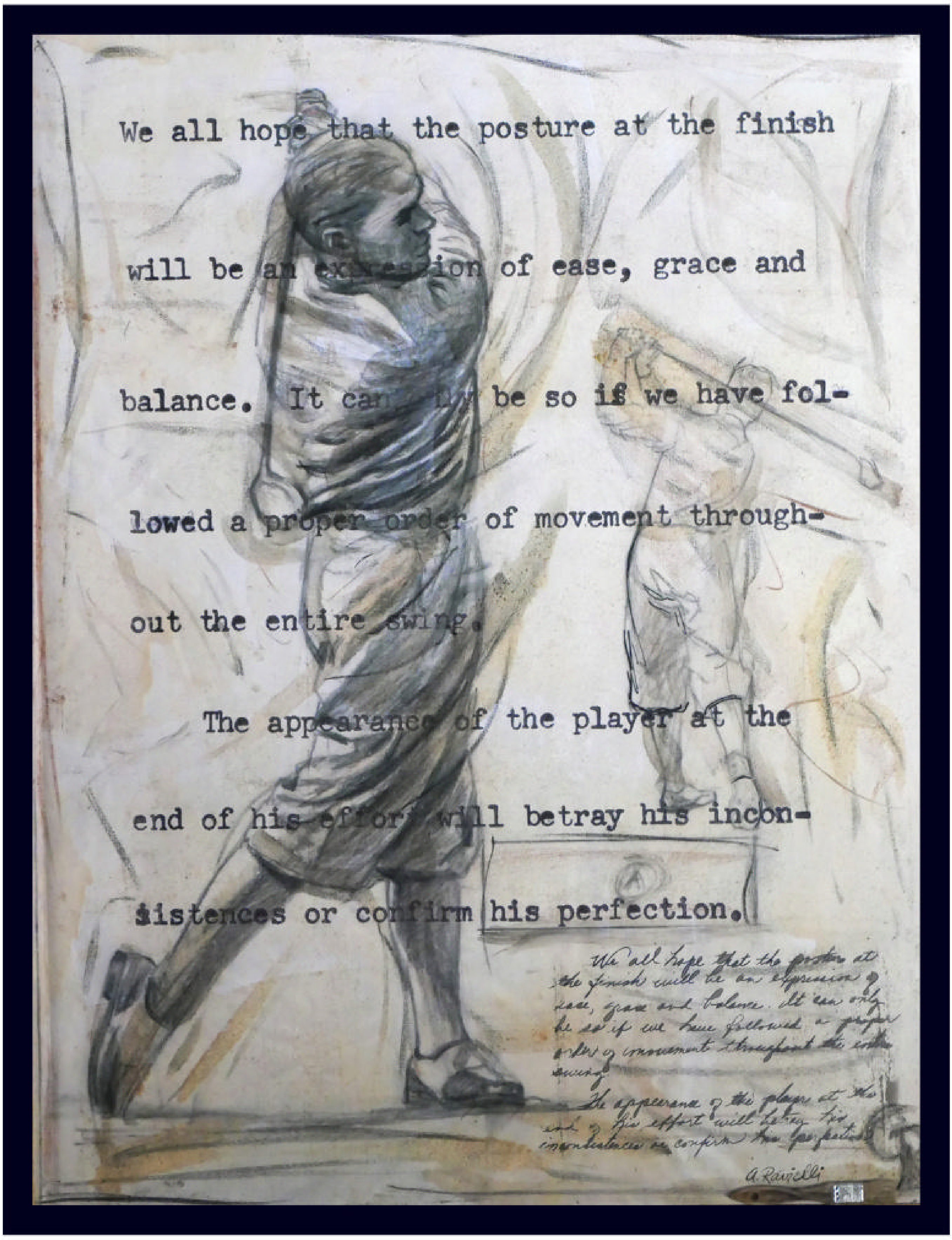
RESCUE SHOTS

ARTIST **CR OBETZ** SALVAGES THE ICONIC DRAWINGS OF ILLUSTRATOR ANTHONY RAVIELLI WITH 21ST-CENTURY **METHODS**

BY EMMA FRANCOIS




We all hope that the posture at the finish
will be an expression of ease, grace and
balance. It can only be so if we have fol-
lowed a proper order of movement through-
out the entire swing.
The appearance of the player at the
end of his effort will betray his incon-
sistences or confirm his perfection.
A. Ravielli

BOBBY JONES
"Follow Through" from the Word Series, mixed media on canvas, 48 by 64 inches.

WHERE ROUTE 41 SKIRTS THROUGH Fort Myers, Fla., there's an abandoned SunTrust bank with thick walls that mostly kept out the recent and devastating floodwaters of Hurricane Ian. This was good fortune for multimedia artist Christopher (CR) Obetz, though also the world, because the building became the studio where Obetz breathes new life into the drawings of the late Anthony Ravielli—famous for illustrating Ben Hogan's *Five Lessons*, Bobby Jones' *The Basic Golf Swing* and many books and magazine covers—giving them a way to live on in the digital era.

It was by pure chance that Obetz came to possess the archives of Ravielli, or "Mister Ravielli," as Obetz refers to him. In 2004, seven years after Ravielli died, Obetz was living in New York City and walking his golden retriever in Central Park. The pair turned onto 75th Street and happened upon a gallery he had never visited. As an artist, Obetz's general instinct is to search for the lost and forgotten, so he ignored the paintings on the main walls and ventured into the back room where he found boxes containing thousands of sketches, notes and scratchboards littering a billiards table. Among them, he recognized the sharp black pen of Anthony Ravielli and knew he had to rescue them.

There was one problem. The portfolio had just been sold. Determined, Obetz pleaded his case to the gallerist, explaining his close connection to golf. His great uncle, Neil Postlewaite, was among the original group who traveled to Europe to help bring the Ryder Cup to the United States. Obetz's dad, Robin, grew up playing golf with Jack Nicklaus and, when Nicklaus married, stood by his side as best man. (When Robin married, Nicklaus was an usher.) As a boy, Obetz took a few lessons from Jack Grout. Before that, Obetz, now 55, learned how to swing by reading *Five Lessons*, which he carried in his childhood golf bag, right where his grandfather told him to keep it. Hogan's words and Ravielli's careful penmanship taught Obetz as much about how to live as they did how to swing a club. The smitten gallerist called his client, and the trio promptly brokered a new deal. Obetz paid about the price of a very nice new car for the trove.

Since then, Obetz has been documenting and preserving Ravielli's work, as well as curating and crafting his own inspired series. During the 2022 Masters, his work was exhibited at the Augusta Museum of History. Never-before-seen Ravielli sketches accompanied Obetz's glittering, sweeping physical and digital iterations of those same sketches.

Nancy Glaser, executive director of the museum, called it an immersive experience. "I was fascinated with how Obetz was able to take these illustrations and transform them into bigger-than-life paintings and digital art. He's bringing Ravielli's legacy to a 21st-century audience."

Among some impromptu patrons that week were Bobby Jones' grandson,

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN TIETZ

Dr. Bob Jones IV, and his wife, Mimi. They had plans to play golf one day, but the air turned "beastly cold," so they decided to pop into the museum instead. The Jones family had been brainstorming ways to celebrate the centennial of their grandfather's major-championship wins. The couple hit it off with Obetz at the museum, and Obetz is now an official artist for the family.

"If the temperature had been 5 degrees warmer, it might not have ever happened," Jones says. He thinks Obetz's work will keep Ravielli's art "alive" and is an "irreplaceable" service to the history of the sport.

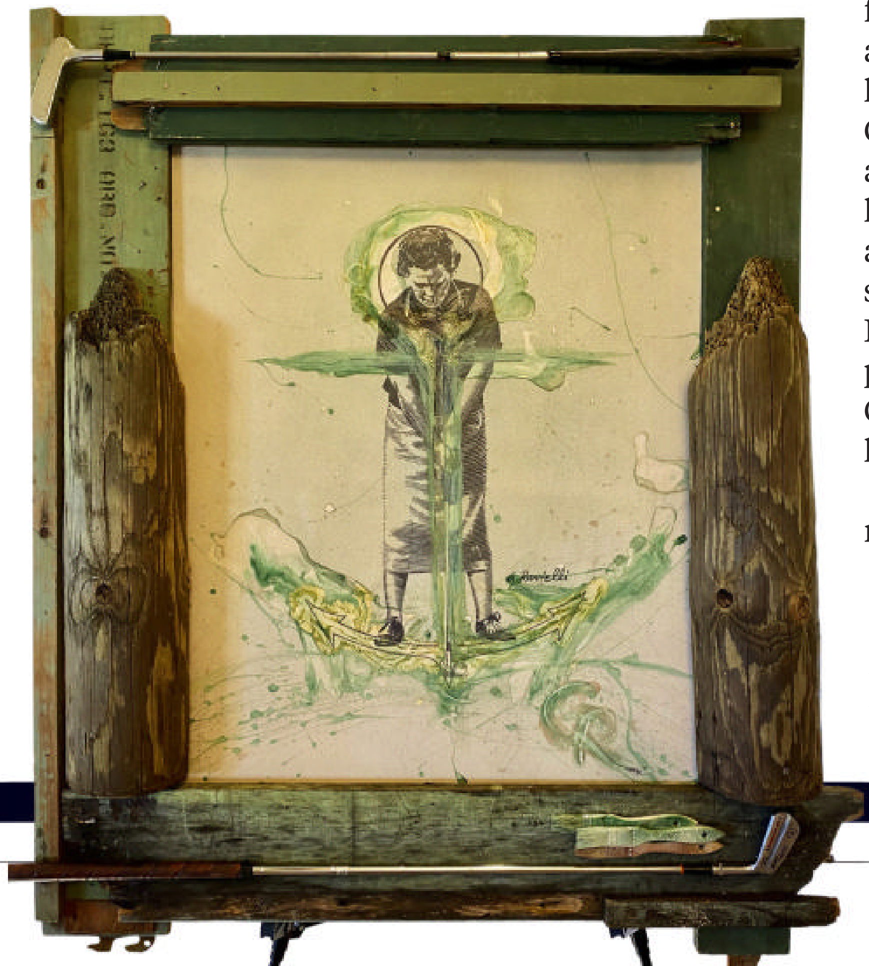
"CR has a very unique gift to take something that is still and give the sense of motion," Jones says. "For the most part, things that have been done of my grandfather have been in black and white or sepia, but what is so neat about CR's work is it brings my grandfather to life in vibrant color."

To create pieces, Obetz draws from his digital archive of Ravielli's work, enlarging the original details and stretching them onto canvas. Then, he overlays veneers, wood finishes, acrylic paints, colored resins, diamond dust, lacquers and sometimes even bunker sand. Whereas Ravielli worked with a surgeon's precision, leaning his nose into his work and etching microscopic details (drawings that, when published, were often at scales only slightly larger than a finger), Obetz works dynamically, stepping in and out and onto works, fluidly pouring paint and rotating large canvases. "My whole paintbrush is a contradiction to how Ravielli worked," he says. To allow one sweeping comparison, Obetz is a Jackson Pollock to Ravielli's Albrecht Dürer. But Obetz shares Ravielli's reverence for the careful, expert athleticism of elite golfers.

In fact, Ravielli contributed work to Golf Digest for more than 30 years, regularly attending staff meetings to discuss his methods and theories. He worked by spending hours carefully observing his subjects, watching each intricacy of their swings and translating this knowledge into sparse yet remarkably detailed lines. Not only did Ravielli capture the precise stance and silhouettes of his golfer-subjects, but also their sense of movement.

In "Anchored," Obetz refreshes a drawing of 15-time major champ Patty Berg with a zesty wash of mint paint. Staccato lines, with gently imprecise angles and edges, allude to the power and measured confidence of Berg's body as she prepares to strike. To emphasize her powerful calm, Ravielli drew an anchor over her body, alluding to not only the practiced sturdiness grounding her swing or the tethered energy of her eyes but the geometric relationship of her body to the Earth, swing and golf ball. This ability to create the perfect visual metaphor is enduring to Ravielli, like, for example, his iconic "pane of glass" rendering of Ben Hogan.

As Obetz says, "My role is to reinforce Ravielli and Patty's vision, to emphasize these tried and true jewels of knowledge from the past." Obetz often pays particular attention to the frame and for "Anchored" retro-fitted two of Berg's Wilson Staff putters and wood pilings from the bridge she walked across every day connecting her home to the Cypress Lake Golf Club. "My artwork is honest and truthful," he says. "I always honor those who came before me and their collaborations. At the same time, I make it my own." He dedicated "Anchored" to his parents and donated the work to Cypress Lake, which is also their home course.



PATTY BERG
"Anchored" from the Legends and Legacies series, mixed media assemblage on canvas, 36 by 42 inches.

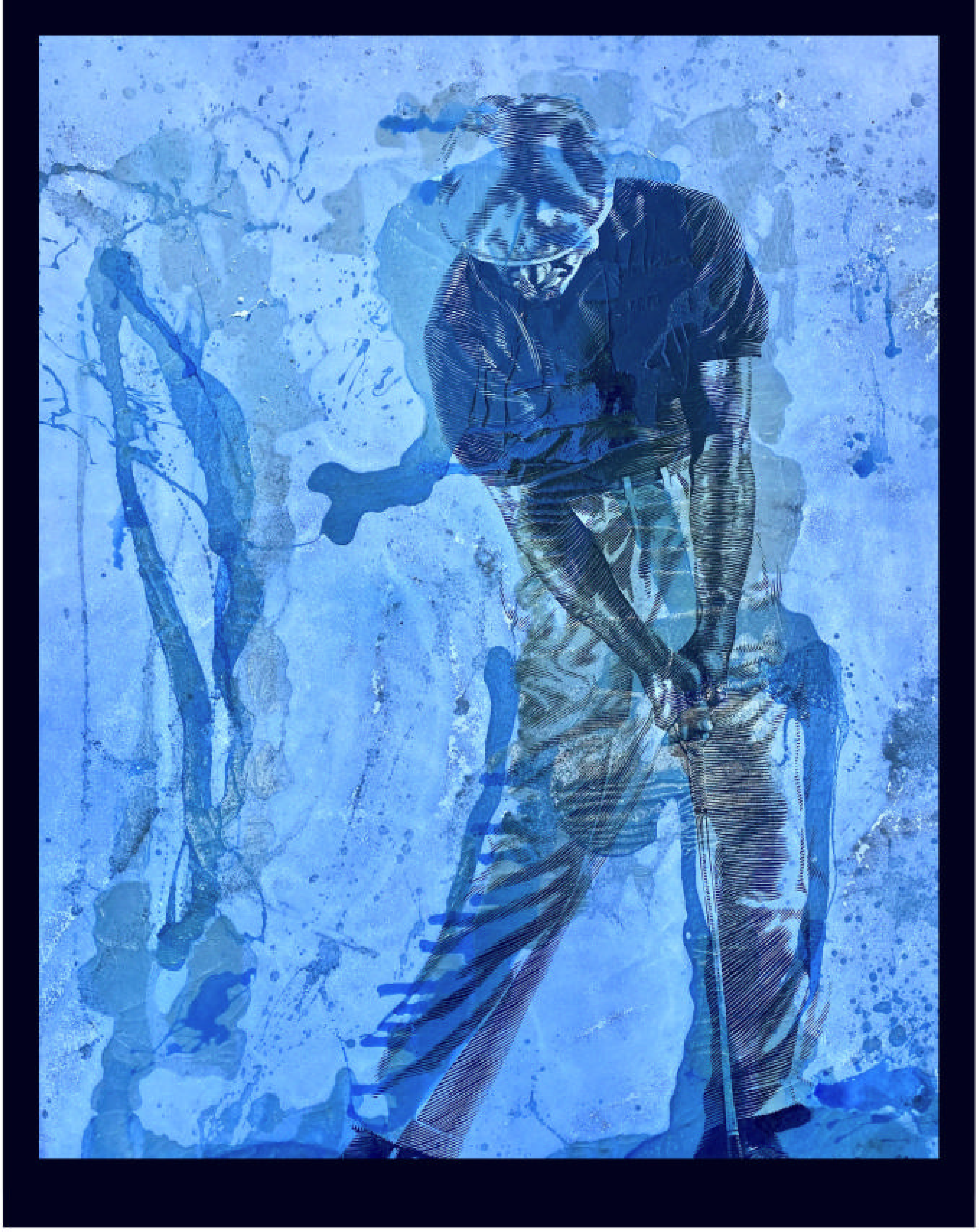
IT WAS BY **PURE CHANCE** THAT OBETZ CAME TO POSSESS THE ARCHIVES OF **RAVIELLI.**

Obetz goes by "CR," but his full name is Christopher Robin—yes, like that Christopher Robin, the beloved children's fictional character and friend of Pooh, Piglet and Eeyore. Sometimes, when he's manning his refurbished tugboat, Little Toot (named for another iconic Disney character), he responds to captain Christopher Robin. "It's really just the three of us," he says, speaking of him, Little Toot, and his other rescued sidekick, Chair, his motley gang on a mission to spread his guiding troika of "hope, faith, and possibility."

Through his platform, he hopes to reach more people in need of reminders to "keep on tooting" and discover the "forgotten beauty found" that makes a life worth living. It's an optimistic, resilient mind-set forged in part by his experience as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse while attending boarding school. Now he's channeling all he has learned overcoming adversities to cultivate a fulfilling and generous artistic life. "I go out openly into the world and see what comes to me," he says. "I just want people to know that who you are today isn't who you are tomorrow."

Obetz works closely with his local Naples/Collier chapter of The First Tee, the nonprofit dedicated to teaching children life skills through golf. He often invites students dockside to his boat for a reading from *Five Lessons* before sending them off to play golf. In another class Obetz teaches, he nurtures students' creativity through a pop-art painting session, priming them for a playfully expressive putting lesson.

"I always tell them, you have to make an impact," Obetz says. "But you also have to follow through."



BEN HOGAN
"Impact" from the Fluid Blue Swing Sequence of Life series, mixed media on canvas, 52 by 72 inches.

To raise money for The First Tee's new learning center, Obetz will be auctioning—as one item—his "Follow Through" painting of Bobby Jones, NFT digital companion and the original Ravielli graphite sketch. With some controlled swings of charcoal, Obetz collaged a reproduction of the sketch with a transfer of Jones' handwritten and typed notes to Ravielli for what Jones hoped the image would convey. *We all hope that the posture at the finish will be an expression of ease, grace and balance. It can only be so if we have followed a proper order of movement throughout the entire swing.*

For an artist whose relationship to his work is so physical—gritty textures, at times walking on his paintings—Obetz's journey into the world of digital art and NFTs might seem unlikely. But for Obetz, NFTs are the natural progression in his mission to introduce Ravielli's work to a larger audience. What he can do in his pop-art sequences is magnified and animated, literally, by digital replication. Obetz plans to create a new series of works based on Bobby Jones. Buyers will receive bundled together the original piece, the swirling digital counterpart, plus a story, penned by Obetz, about the making of the work, its larger meaning and Ravielli's history. (*Editor's note: Golf Digest will be sharing in commissions for promotional work around this series.*)

"I hope that Mr. Ravielli, Mr. Hogan and Mr. Jones all are looking down and smiling knowing that their lives and legacies had meaning and purpose, and that they are in good hands," Obetz says. "I never knew any of them, but I've made it my passion to get to know them as deeply as possible before I make the first brushstroke."

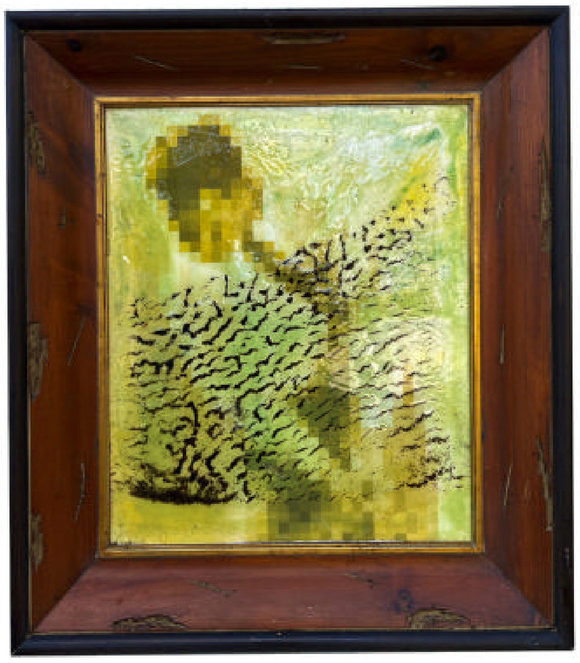
After Hurricane Ian, Obetz helped his community heal and repair and didn't paint for two months. His studio flooded, but, remarkably, only one piece was damaged. It's a small work repurposing an image of Jones at impact, though Obetz recolored and pixelated the face so that it reads almost as impressionistic. The old-fashioned speckled brown wood frame, a nod to the Augusta National pines, juxtaposes the techy rendering of Jones. The most striking details are the fractured umber ripples crossing the canvas, tracing Jones' figure.

"The hurricane left this incredibly painterly stroke across my painting, literally to the same motion of the swing," Obetz says. It's as if the water, too, follows the *Five Lessons*.

Obetz immediately thought, *Oh, my God, I'm saving that. More resin. That's a piece of Bobby Jones art history.*

BOTH SHARE **REVERENCE** FOR THE CAREFUL, EXPERT ATHLETICISM OF GOLFERS.

BOBBY JONES
"Impact, with Flood Waters" from the Op Art Pop Art Pixel series, 20 by 24 inches.



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LIKE A GLOVE

BOXING CHAMP AND PHILANTHROPIST **CANELO ÁLVAREZ** IS A FITTING WINNER OF THE ARNIE AWARD

BY CHRISTOPHER POWERS • ILLUSTRATION BY ZÉ OTAVIO

TO WIN WORLD TITLES IN FOUR WEIGHT CLASSES, Saul (Canelo) Álvarez has displayed levels of determination and discipline that few can fathom. Perhaps it's no surprise those character traits have transferred to the golf course, a gentle place the undisputed super middleweight champion might never leave when he eventually hangs up his gloves. "I plan to play golf every single day," Álvarez says of his retirement plans. "No doubt about it. I'll be able to practice more and be more focused because now I still have to focus on my sport."

Álvarez was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, where he grew up on a ranch as the youngest of eight children, seven of them brothers, all of whom became professional boxers. Fighting was in his blood, and he got plenty of practice as a child who was taunted by other kids for having red hair and freckles. He got in a fight basically every day, and he has been fighting ever since, turning pro at the age of 15 and compiling a record of 58-2-2 with 39 knockouts. There was never much time for golf until Álvarez was drawn to the game three years ago, just a few months before the COVID pandemic hit. He became addicted. "I like everything about the game," Álvarez says. "You need to be focused on every shot, and you need to be very patient. It's the most important thing about both sports, and golf has actually helped my boxing."

In a short period of time, he has worked to become a 9-handicap—though he's quick to point out that he hasn't been playing of late because he's still healing from wrist surgery in November. In his most recent fight, part three of a trilogy against Gennadiy (Triple G) Golovkin, Álvarez couldn't close his left fist, an injury issue that occurred during a TKO over Caleb Plant almost two years ago. Despite the nagging injury, he won the Triple G fight by unanimous decision.

In the ring Álvarez gives everything he has, and when it comes to charity, he shows a similar spirit, which is why the 32-year-old fighter is set to receive Golf Digest's highest honor, The Arnie Award, this February at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am. Álvarez is well known for his contributions to improving communities in Mexico, especially among underprivileged children.

"At some point, I've been in their shoes," he says. "I know how hard it is for them. Helping others is very important, and I do it with all my heart."

In 2017, Álvarez donated $1 million worth of supplies, medicine and construction materials to relief efforts in Mexico after a magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck central and southern Mexico. He has also been generous with hospital patients in need, working with the International Community Foundation to cover the costs of many organ transplants. In addition, he has provided cochlear implants for patients with hearing disabilities and has paid for medications, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and oncological treatments for children with cancer in the hospitals of Guadalajara.

Despite being a golfer for just three years, Álvarez is well aware of The King.

"I watch [Arnold Palmer] on YouTube and on TV, too, those classic moments," he says. "He's one of the best golfers in the history of golf. It's an honor for me to get this award in such a short career in golf. I'm blessed and so happy."

Álvarez's next fight date and opponent remain unclear though he has hinted at a May return (Cinco de Mayo weekend is a tradition for him), and he's hopeful for a rematch with Dmitry Bivol, one of two fighters to have defeated Álvarez. The other loss occurred in 2013 to undefeated Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Once his wrist is fully healed, the training will begin, both in the ring and on the golf course. Álvarez says that on a typical day, after five hours of boxing training, he practices and plays golf for about two to four hours.

"Like a pro," Álvarez says, "that's the only way to improve."

RYAN PALMER AND HIS DENTIST WIFE BRIGHTEN SMILES

BY KEELY LEVINS • ILLUSTRATION BY ZÉ OTAVIO

In 2003, Ryan Palmer earned his PGA Tour card. After just a few starts, he was already talking with friends and family about starting a foundation.

In part, he was following the example of his father, Butch, who was an active member of The Shriners. "Giving back was instilled in my heart at a young age by seeing what my dad did and all the kids they helped out," Palmer says. The Ryan Palmer Foundation began with a simple goal: help the community of Amarillo, Texas, where he grew up. "The foundation is my way of saying thank you to the city for what they did for me," Palmer says.

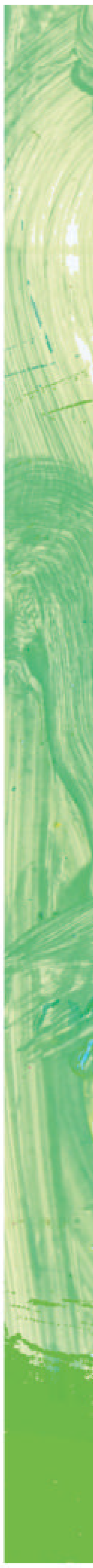
Now 46 and entering his 20th season, the four-time winner is popular among other players. The Ryan Palmer Foundation does many of the kinds of things you would expect a tour pro's charity to do, like supporting local junior golf tournaments, college scholarships and building an indoor practice facility for the West Texas A&M University golf program. But the Palmers have also aimed their charity at the medical field, like the garden and game center they built at the Children's Hospital in Amarillo, Texas. It's a space for children and their parents to get a reprieve from the intensity of being in the hospital.

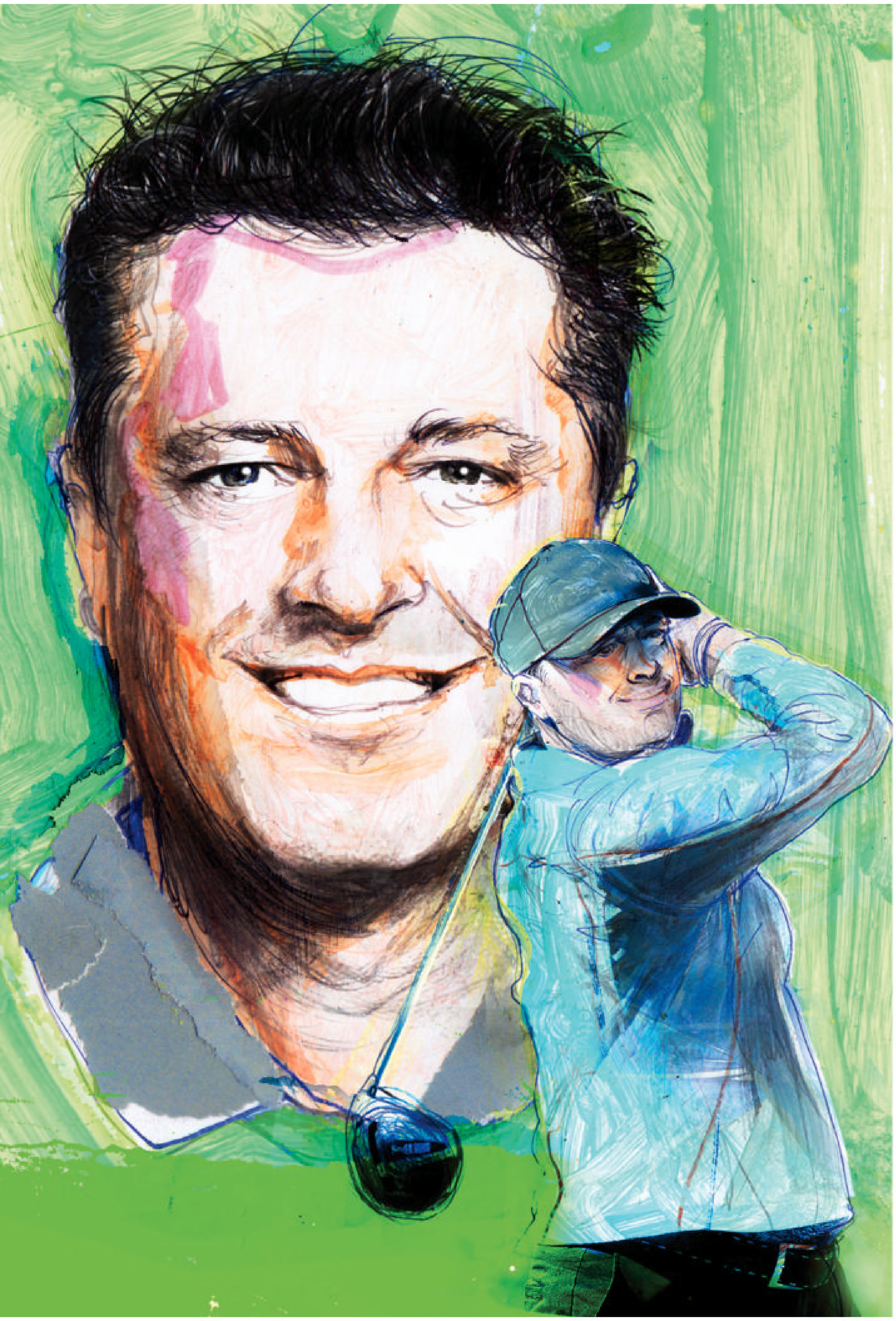
Palmer's wife, Jennifer, has been involved with the foundation from the beginning, and it was her experience as a licensed dentist that catalyzed one of the unique aspects of the foundation: Brighter Smiles. The couple works with three local dentists to find children in need of dental care—from orthodontics to cleft-palate surgery—whose families can't afford it. Brighter Smiles covers the cost for as many surgeries as it can each year, having helped more than 70 kids so far.

Palmer remembers one girl who wore a hoodie to school every day, trying to obscure her face as much as possible. "She was embarrassed and getting bullied because of the way her teeth looked," Palmer said. Brighter Smiles paid for her surgery. "The aftermath of the surgery was hearing about how popular she was and the beautiful smile she now has and the confidence she gained in herself because of it. It hit me harder than you can imagine."

The Palmers added another branch to the foundation after they went through what Palmer calls the scariest time of their lives: In 2016, Jennifer was diagnosed with breast cancer. Through their breast cancer initiative, they fund a mobile mammogram unit to help women in Texas get access to mammograms who otherwise wouldn't, and they put together kits for women who are getting breast-cancer treatment. "It has all the little things Jennifer wanted and needed while she went through chemo, like blankets, books, socks," Palmer said. They've sent over 500 kits to women who have received breast cancer diagnoses.

From making junior golf tournaments affordable to making dental surgery and mammograms acces-





sible, Palmer sees in his foundation the realization of the goal he started with two decades ago. “This is what I’ve always wanted to do with my foundation,” Palmer says, “Have an immediate impact.

“I’m truly honored and blessed to win such a prestigious award,” Palmer says. “What I truly love about it is, it’s not for what I’ve won or done on the golf course. It’s the fact that I’ve watched and learned from many about giving back. Thank you, Arnie, for paving the way and showing us what it is to be the ultimate professional.”

THE SPIRIT OF ARNOLD PALMER LIVES ON

No individual golfer ever gave back more than Arnold Palmer did, and that’s why the highest award Golf Digest bestows is called The Arnie. This is the 11th consecutive year Golf Digest has celebrated golfers who give back, partnering with the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, the Monterey Peninsula Foundation and the Arnold & Winnie Palmer Foundation. This year, in recognition of their charitable works, our joint panel selected boxing champion Canelo Álvarez and PGA Tour pro Ryan Palmer as the two recipients of The Arnie. At the 2023 AT&T in February, each will receive a trophy-size version of a Palmer bronze sculpture created by the artist Zenos Frudakis. Also, Golf Digest will donate a total of $100,000 to the Monterey Peninsula Foundation and the Arnold & Winnie Palmer Foundation.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2016 Niall Horan, Peyton Manning, Phil Mickelson
2017 Juli Inkster, Kelly Slater, Clay Walker
2018 Davis Love III, Jim Nantz, Darius Rucker
2019 Toby Keith, Jordan Spieth, Steve Young
2020 Arnie’s Army
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TWICE AS NICE Lydia Ko won Rolex Player of the Year honors for the second time in 2022.

DOMINATE ON THE GREENS

Try my two drills to hole more putts

By Lydia Ko

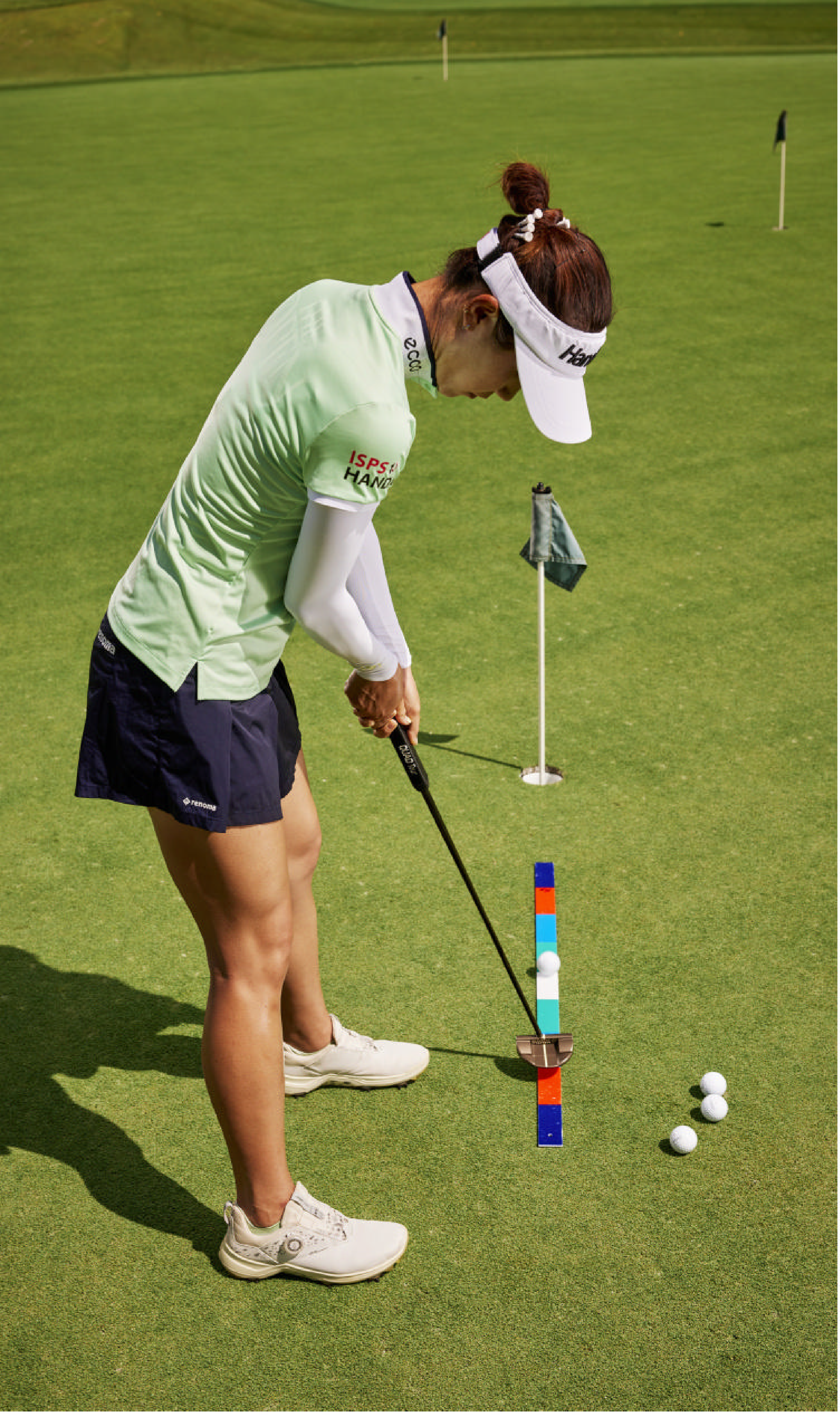
STATISTICALLY, 2022 WAS perhaps my best season ever on the LPGA Tour. In 22 starts, my scoring average was a career-low 68.99 strokes, and 76 percent of my rounds (65 of 85) were under par.

Much of my success could be traced to my putter. Through the season-ending CME Group Tour Championship, I led the tour's strokes gained/putting (+1.360) and putts per greens in regulation (1.722) stats. Because of my putting ability, I'm frequently asked for pointers, even from other players. I don't want to give away all of my secrets, but here are two of my go-to drills that I work on before every tournament. If you incorporate these into your regular routine, you're going to control your line and speed better and hole a lot more putts. Give them a try.

—WITH MADELINE MACCLURG

LYDIA KO, 25, is the youngest tournament winner in LPGA history (age 15). She has 19 wins, including two majors.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JENSEN LARSON



ROLL IT DOWN THE PLANK TO START IT ON LINE

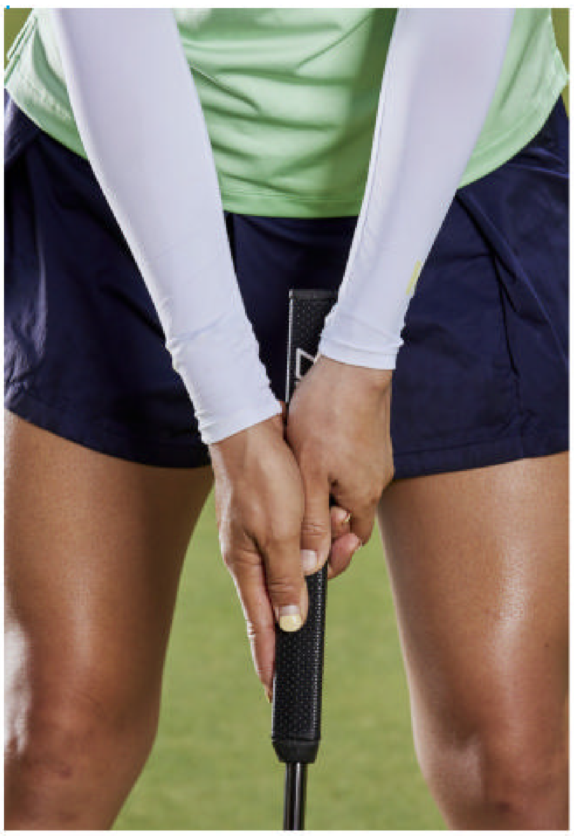
Find a flat putt on the practice green and line up a ruler or similar with the hole. Place the ball down toward the back of the ruler, and hit some putts, trying to keep the ball on the ruler (*above*) all the way to the end.

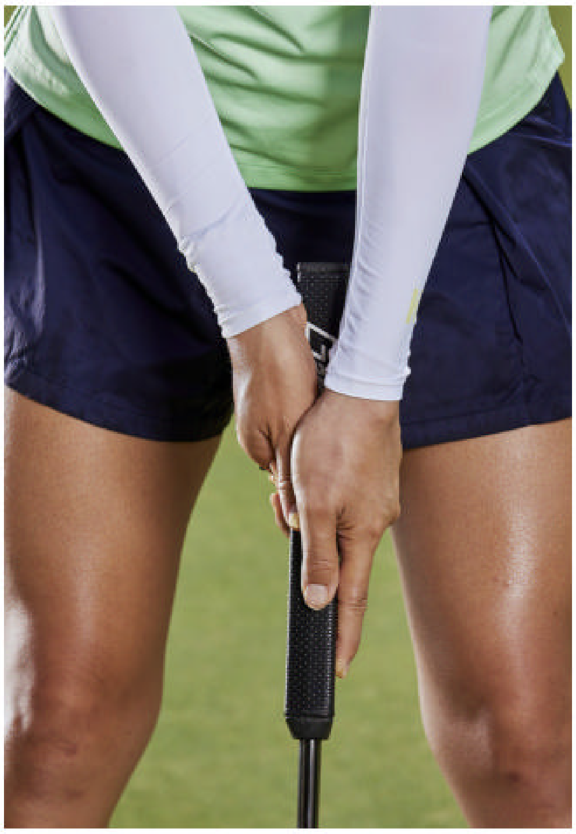
What's happening if you can't keep it on the ruler for very long? If it drops off to the left, the putterface is closing through impact (for righties). Conversely, if it drops off to the right, the face is opening. This drill is one of my favorites because it gives me instant feedback on my face control. You know if your putts are starting on the line you chose.

TAILOR YOUR GRIP TO THE LENGTH OF PUTT

If you have a sharp eye, you might notice that I alternate between a conventional and lead-hand-low grip. I typically use the conventional grip on longer putts because it gives me a greater feel for the length and pace of the stroke needed to hit the ball the required distance.

The lead-hand-low grip gives me more face stability on shorter rolls that require a more precise stroke. In general, I putt with a lead-hand-low grip inside 15 feet and switch to the conventional grip outside of that. See if this strategy helps you with lags and holing the short ones.

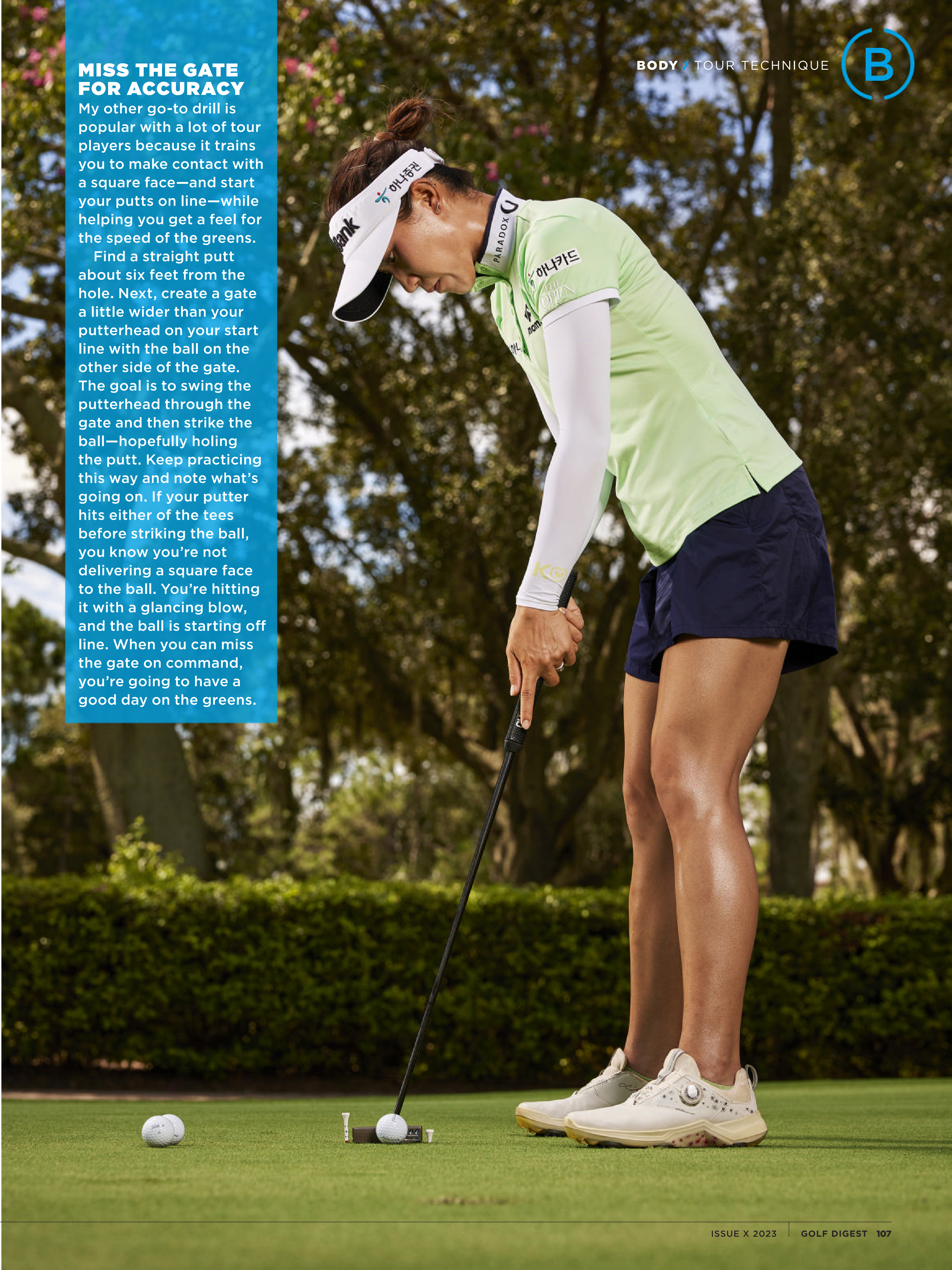


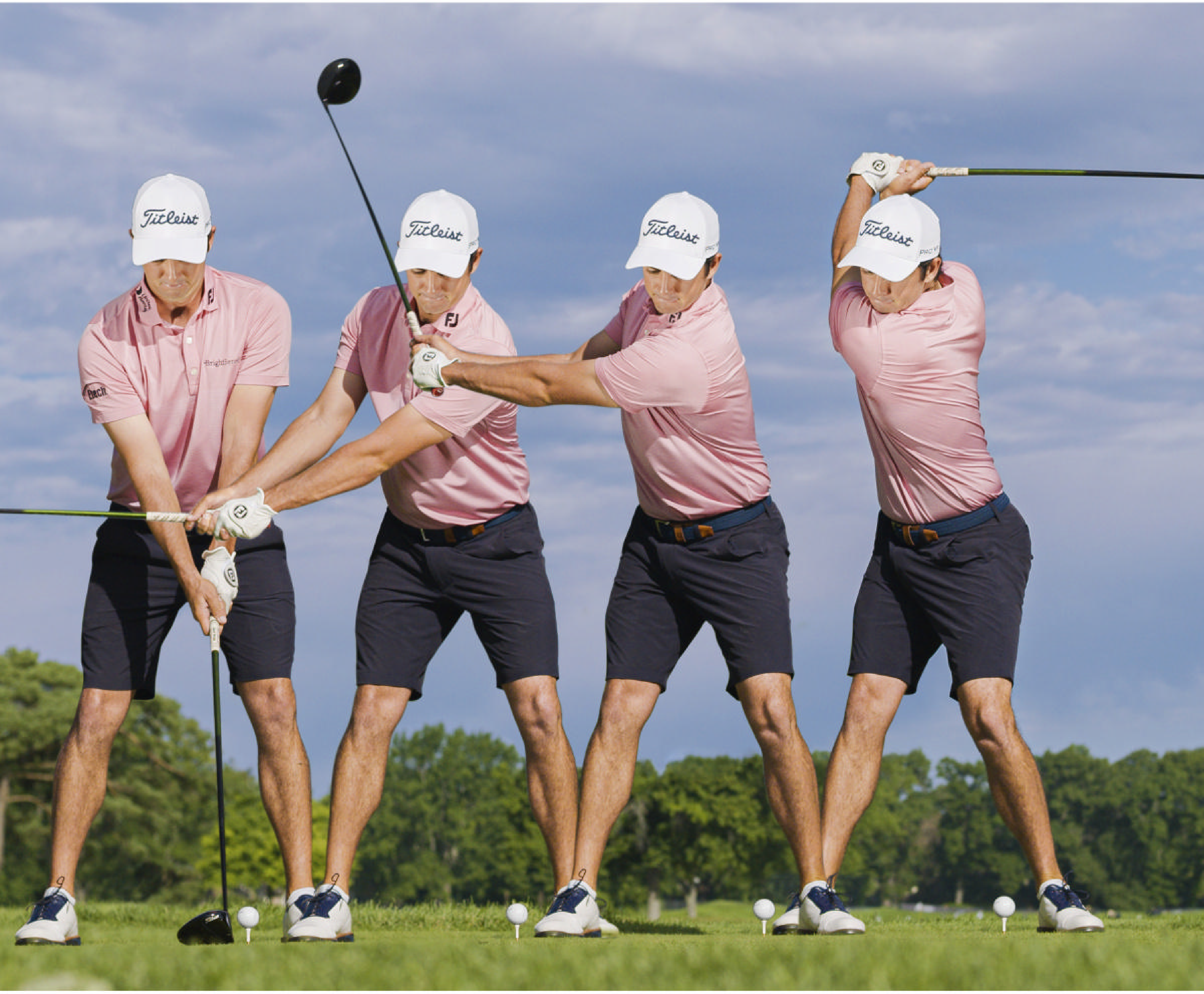


MISS THE GATE FOR ACCURACY

My other go-to drill is popular with a lot of tour players because it trains you to make contact with a square face—and start your putts on line—while helping you get a feel for the speed of the greens.

Find a straight putt about six feet from the hole. Next, create a gate a little wider than your putterhead on your start line with the ball on the other side of the gate. The goal is to swing the putterhead through the gate and then strike the ball—hopefully holing the putt. Keep practicing this way and note what's going on. If your putter hits either of the tees before striking the ball, you know you're not delivering a square face to the ball. You're hitting it with a glancing blow, and the ball is starting off line. When you can miss the gate on command, you're going to have a good day on the greens.





A MODERN CLASSIC

Davis Riley's key move evokes great swings of the past

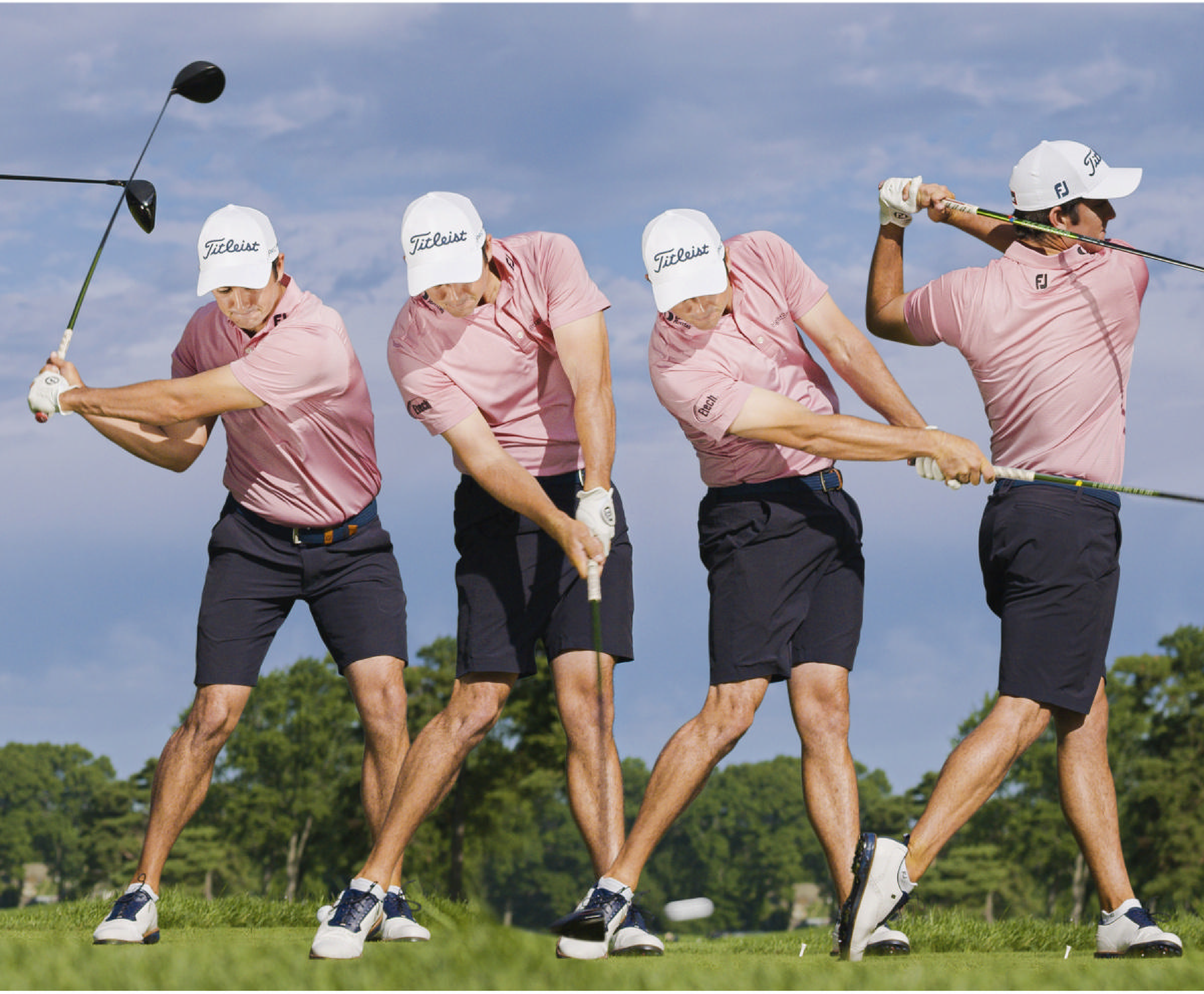
By Dave Allen

DAVIS RILEY'S SILKY SMOOTH, graceful-looking swing is one that many admire. One tweet from an overzealous fan described it as "borderline erotic." Um, OK. That aside, the former Alabama star does seem to have a move that generates accuracy and power.

One of the top rookies on the PGA Tour last season, Riley, 26, finished second to fellow newcomer Cameron Young in top-10 finishes (seven to six) and ranked eighth in total driving, hitting 62 percent of fairways and averaging nearly 308 yards off the tee. Riley's effortless power results from "the freedom and rotation of his pelvis and spine" on the backswing, says Jeff Smith, Riley's swing coach the past two seasons. Riley no longer tries to restrict the movement of his lower body relative to his upper body, which used to handcuff one of his greatest assets—his athleticism.

"Note how his left knee is internally rotated and behind the ball at the top of the backswing," says Smith, the director of instruction at Spring Creek Ranch in

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOM FURORE



Collierville, Tenn. "That's a classic move you've seen throughout history with some of the greatest players, including Jack Nicklaus, Ben Hogan and Sam Snead. It allows him to create a huge amount of turn with his lower body, without swaying off the ball a whole lot."

As Riley transitions forward into the downswing, his pelvis moves ever so slightly toward the target while his head remains centered, creating a modest side tilt to his torso. This allows Riley to feel like he's more level and on top of the ball through impact, Smith says, so he can start the ball more on line instead of slinging it right to left. Previously, Riley had too much lateral motion with his hips, causing his spine to tilt back too much. As a result, he would have to slow down to keep the ball in play.

"Now that he's learned how to turn and tilt his body correctly, he can absolutely let it go on every swing," says Smith, who also coaches tour pros Viktor Hovland, Aaron Wise, Patrick Rodgers and Brandon Wu.

This freedom is evident at impact, when Riley's club shaft is in line with his left arm and "he's throwing the daylights out of the club," Smith says. In the very next frame, Riley's right hand is crossing over his left, and his left hand is going into full extension, like he was flinging a Frisbee. That's the throw. "There's no 'hold on' to the club," Smith says.

Couple that with the ground reaction force Riley initiates by pushing down with his left leg, and he is able to create clubhead speeds up to 125 miles per hour. "He's not a giant, so to be able to create that much speed, it's because his technique is so sound," Smith says.

RAISE YOUR FITNESS IQ

The top minds in exercise science want to help you train smarter

By Ron Kaspriske

PHOTOGRAPHS OF TRAINER KEVIN DUFFY BY ADAM GLANZMAN

HOPEFULLY YOU REALIZE that if you're getting ready to get back in the gym, or perhaps making your debut, the first thing you should do is be evaluated by a qualified fitness professional. Know your strengths and limitations to get the most out of your workouts and reduce the chance of injury. That being said, if you want to train smarter for golf, heed this advice from several of the best fitness experts in the country.

- For maximum force output, breathe out during the concentric (muscle shortening) phase of an exercise and breathe in during the eccentric (lengthening) phase. The same strategy should be employed during a golf swing—a smooth inhale during the backswing and a controlled exhale during the downswing. *—Michael Mullin, breathing expert, Integrative Rehab Training*

- Breath work impacts every biochemical process in the body and is crucial to athletic performance. You should inhale for five to six seconds and exhale for five to six seconds through the nose—and the nose only—as much as possible. This will activate the parasympathetic nervous system, calming the body and stimulating the diaphragm—which is critical to healthy breathing. *—Dan Hellman, physical therapist and trainer, H3 by Dan Hellman*

- In looking at sleep's role in health and performance, the most important factor is the total time asleep. At least seven hours is recommended in a dark, cool, quiet room. As a general rule, that means no TV or screen browswing for an hour before bed. *—Mikael Mattsson, doctor of exercise physiology, svexa/ Stanford University*

- Do this postural "reset" exercise for better athletic performance. Without shoes, stand up and turn in your feet so your big toes are touching. Lace your hands behind your head with your elbows flared and squeeze your thigh muscles for 60 seconds. Do this a few times a day, especially before working out or playing golf. *—Brian Bradley, trainer and posture expert, the Egoscue Method*

- Perform myofascial-release techniques such as foam rolling using softer, squishier tools (balls, rollers, etc.). The muscles and your nervous system respond more favorably (less bracing, involuntary contractions, etc.) to softer rollers compared to harder ones. *—Jill Miller, fascia expert, Tune Up Fitness*

- Explosive exercises that ramp up your swing speed, such as box jumps and olympic lifts, should be performed at the beginning of a workout. When you're tired and not going "all out," you're no longer training the fast-twitch muscle fibers needed to increase swing speed. *—Mitch Sadowsky, director of fitness, Lake Nona Golf & Country Club in Orlando*

- Opt for high-intensity interval training instead of endurance cardiovascular exercises. In other words, instead of 30 minutes of jogging, do a 30-to-60-second sprint on a bike, followed by a short rest, and then go right into another sprint. You're playing a sport that requires bursts of energy, so train like it. *—Lindsay Becker, physical therapist, Buckeye Performance Golf*

- Once you've been cleared for exercise, train using this progression: Start with improving posture before proceeding to flexibility work. Then move to stability work before strength training. Power comes last. This ensures safety. Break the order, break the golfer. *—Dan Hellman*

● Do standing upper-body exercises with your feet pointing straight, about a fist-width apart. This narrow stance causes a change in the orientation of the hip joint and activates the deep hip stabilization muscles and power movers. The end result will be a more balanced and powerful golf stance. *—Brian Bradley*

● How important is hydration? You could live for three weeks without food, but only two or three days without water. And while water is king when it comes to staying hydrated, too much of it can lead to an imbalance in electrolytes and a lack of nutrients. Supplement your intake with something that balances electrolytes, such as LivPur, which also includes branch chain amino acids that aid in performance, stamina and recovery. *—Troy Van Biezen, golf-fitness trainer and chiropractor, ChiroSport Specialists of Dallas*

● Isometric (no change in muscle length) core exercises such as planks and pallof presses are great for protecting your spine and avoiding back pain. At the same time, they activate the stabilizing muscles necessary for better connection between the upper and lower body. Core exercises that focus more on rotation put too much stress on the lower back. *—Jeff Pelizzaro, golf-fitness trainer, 18STRONG*

● I love planks, too, but don't clasp your hands together. That causes more of a rounded posture and flexion in the mid-back area, which eventually leads to a decrease in rotational mobility and increases your chance of losing your spine angle, swinging with a flatter shoulder plane or reverse pivoting—all bad. Instead, do planks with your palms skyward and forearms parallel. You should have a feeling of a long, stable spine and broad shoulder girdle, similar to the role this region plays in the golf swing. This makes rotating the hips and shoulders so much easier. *—Dave Maloney, exercise physiologist/golf biomechanist, Golf Conditioning & Performance*

● Focus on mobility work that increases range of motion around the joints most important in the golf swing. It's much more valuable than static stretching. Static, long-hold stretches have some value, but it takes a lot of time and effort to induce change, thus making them inefficient. *—Mitch Sadowsky*

● Do loaded exercises (with weights) that don't unnecessarily stress your lower back. Golf already puts your lumbar spine in a state of stress. An example of a good exercise would be a goblet squat—a dumbbell is held vertically and pinned to your chest—instead of a back squat where the barbell is across your shoulders. *—Jennifer Fleischer, golf-fitness trainer, Fleischer Tour Fit*

● Move slower with external loads like dumbbells, barbells, etc., especially during the eccentric (muscle-lengthening) phase of an exercise. This puts the tissue under tension longer and builds more strength. *—Jeff Pelizzaro*

● Push-ups are a classic exercise for the chest muscles, and the pectorals are among the most active during the golf swing. Unfortunately, traditional push-ups put your wrists

8LB

in flexion, stressing a joint already stressed by golf. Instead, do dumbbell chest presses (neutral wrist position) or even better, a one-arm cable fly where you push the cable up and across the center line of your chest. That mimics what your arms are doing during a golf swing. *—Ben Shear, Golf Digest's Chief Fitness Advisor, Ben Shear Golf*

● When training for golf, "carry" exercises such as the farmer's walk (holding a relatively heavy weight at your sides while walking) and the suitcase carry (weight held with only one arm) are super important to the side-bending facets of the golf swing as well as improving grip strength. A stronger grip leads to more power and better control of the clubface. *—Kevin Duffy, golf-fitness trainer, Rotational Power and Strength*

● An exercise I love for golfers is a one-armed, bent-over row. Bend at the hips, place one hand on a bench, wrist straight, and grab a dumbbell with the other. While bent over with your spine relatively flat, pull the dumbbell up. This engages the muscles that retract the scapula (shoulder blades) while training the big lat muscles of your upper back. Both are important to maintaining thoracic posture and preventing the chicken wing (flared elbow) when you swing. *—Andrea Doddato, golf-fitness trainer, Shape & Sport*

● Start doing hip bridges. They train the all-important glutes and hamstrings, essential muscles for virtually every aspect of the swing including power generation and maintaining posture. Lie on your back, knees bent, and place a yoga block between your thighs and squeeze. This will align your pelvis and activate the adductors (inside thigh muscles). Exhale as you pull your ribs down while raising your hips. The breath will align the rib cage and pelvis while firing up your glutes and hamstrings. What you don't want is to feel any stress in the lower back. *—Tim Neumann, golf-fitness trainer, Par 5 Performance*

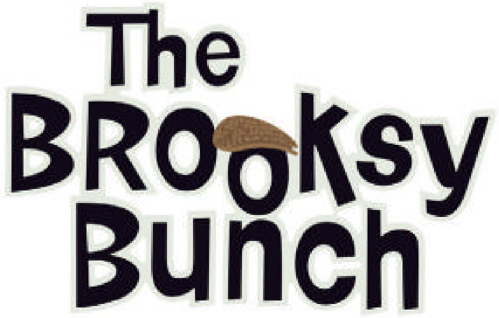
● I like goblet squats, too (holding the weight pinned against your chest). Another way to use them for golf is to squat laterally. This will enhance your ability to move side to side (frontal plane) during the golf swing, training a better weight shift. It also will help you recruit the ground better for more power in your swing. *—Ben Shear*

● When improving any movement pattern, several studies have concluded you will have a greater chance of success if your focus is external (directed toward the effects of a movement) instead of internal (directed toward the movement itself, i.e., referencing body parts). For example, if I wanted to get you to throw a medicine ball with maximum effort, it's better for you to think about *throwing the ball through the wall* than thinking about *rotating your upper body as hard as you can and then releasing the ball with your arms*. This concept holds true no matter the athletic task, so remember to avoid thinking about body parts when learning new skills, gym or golf, this offseason. *—Will Wu, doctor of motor control and learning, Long Beach State University*

LIV Golf Team Names That Didn’t Make the Cut

If you thought the approved team names were off, wait until you see the ones they scrapped

By Coleman Bentley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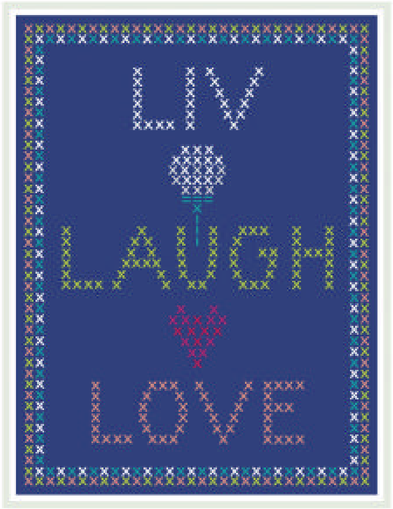
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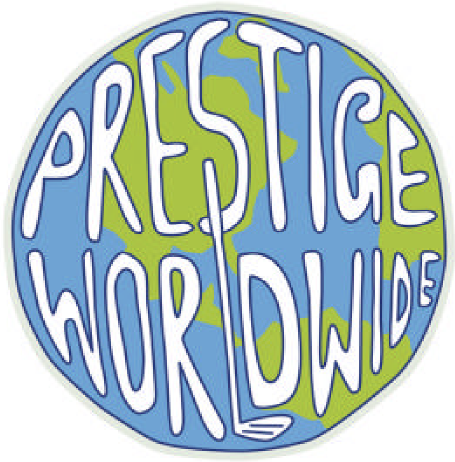
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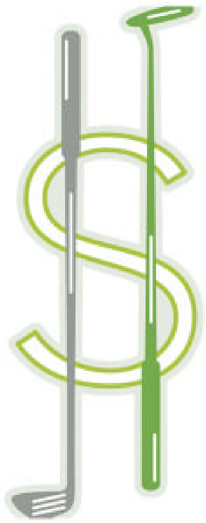
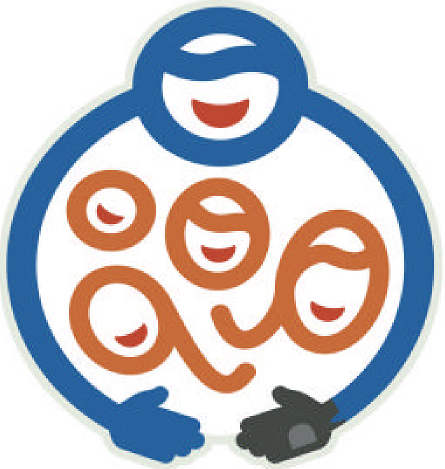
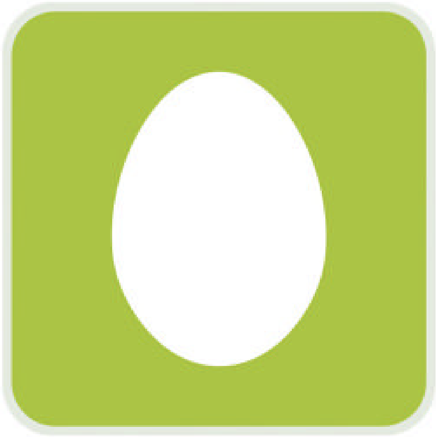
PRESTIGE WORLDWIDE



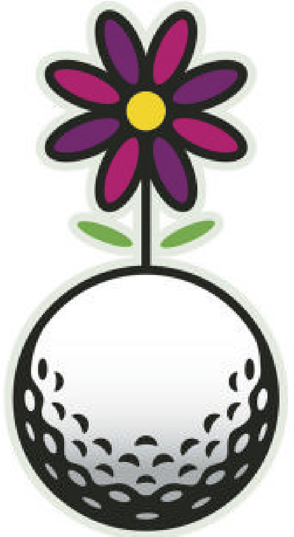
SHOW ME THE MONEY



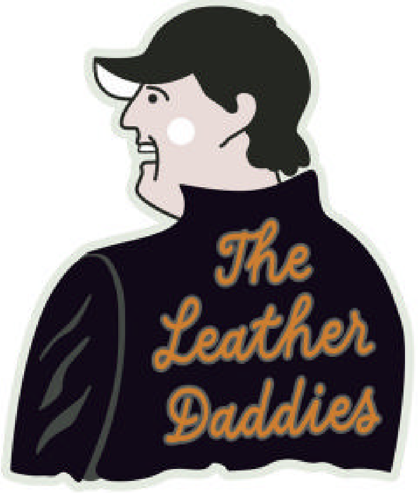
THE FAMILY MEN



@TROLLERS



THE GAME GROWERS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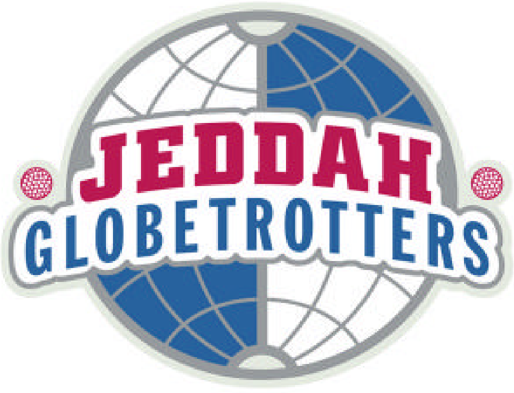
THE LEATHER DADDIES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THE JEDDAH GLOBETROTTERS

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